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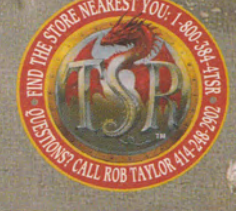

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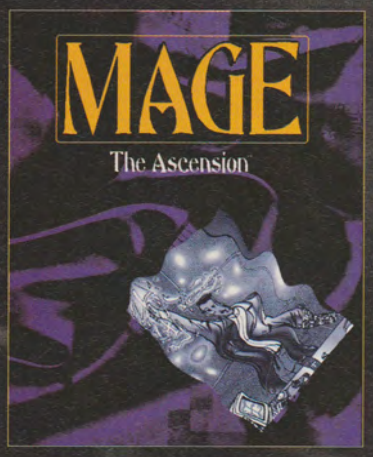

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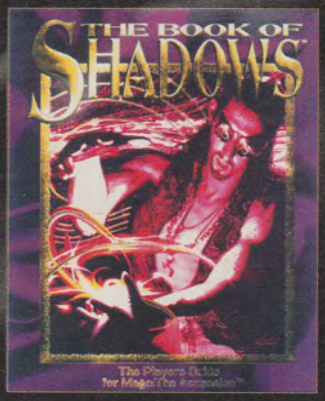

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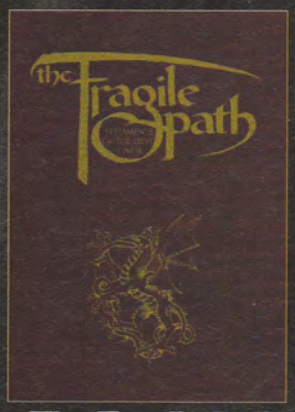

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"Ooh, he's an odd cove that Mr Smith. I saw two people go in his shop yesterday and neither of 'em came out."

Encounters on page 45

In the beginning there were things that crawled. 20,000 years on and things haven't improved much.

Worldbuilder on page 40

"You boy, what are you doing under your desk? It's about time you bucked your ideas up m'laddie."

Skool Roolz on page 26

You'd have thought they'd have discovered a cure for cancer, but smoking's still bad for you in 2027.

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If you would like to subscribe you should telephone 01225 822511, *fax* 01458 274378, *or write to*
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The subscription rate for 12 issues is:
UK £30
Europe £42
US £54.75
Rest of World £58.75

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arcane Printed in the UK by
TPL Printers (UK) Ltd
ABC Member of the **Audit Bureau of Circulation**
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Main cover image by Parente Studios
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Future PUBLISHING

This issue would have been impossible without... **Double-action Lockets**
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **Christmas**

Up Front

The wise ones said it would happen. And now it has. The New Year kicked off very unpleasantly indeed for the gaming industry as the collectable card game backlash hit home. The first news we got was when Wizards of the Coast announced significant redundancies at its Seattle offices. The implication wasn't clear at first, but it soon became apparent that Wizards had dropped all its roleplaying games. *Everway, Ars Magica* and *SLA Industries* were no longer to be supported and the company would concentrate specifically on its Deckmaster line of collectable card games.

Illustration Simon Gurr

And then, just a few days before this issue went to press, we heard that Games Designers Workshop, most famous for *Traveller* and one of the oldest RPG companies around, had announced that it would cease trading.

So is this the much predicted backlash? The backlash that is supposed to be the inevitable consequence of people spending money on CCGs rather than roleplaying games? Does it signal the death of roleplaying?

Well, yes and no. Yes, it probably is a part of the 'backlash' that many people have predicted for some time. There is only so much money in your pocket to spend on games and if you spend a lot of it on card games, then you've got less to spend on others. And there's also the argument that your local shop owner (who incidentally will tell you that he's very glad indeed to have had the extra income from *Magic: The Gathering*) has also spent more of his money on ordering card games, meaning that he may have cut back on the range of roleplaying games he's willing to stock.

And no, it most certainly does not mean the death of roleplaying. Games Designers Workshop has looked to be in trouble for the last five years, and the poor critical reception of *Traveller: The New Era* was almost certainly what proved to be the final straw.

As for Wizards of the Coast, I always had the impression that they published roleplaying games more for sentimental reasons than any good business sense. Most of the staff are gaming fanatics and their roots are in roleplaying.

But the way they produced games such as *Everway* never seemed very practical. Sure, they introduced a new standard for graphical design in games, but what they ended up with was something that was too expensive and too ambitious for the average roleplayer. So it comes as no great surprise to find that they weren't making money from their RPGs and, being a big business, they decided to drop them.

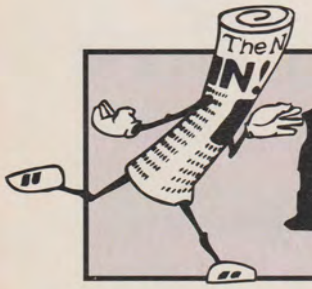
Instead of analysing the reasons for Wizards' and GDW's failures perhaps we should instead look at the rest of the hobby and see how well that's doing. And the answer is of course, better than ever. Companies like TSR and Games Workshop have recently celebrated their most successful years and the hobby as a whole is growing and growing.

We may have sadly lost GDW, but there are plenty of new companies such as Daedalus (who we featured in **arcane** 1) who are committed to producing their own new RPGS. And last month in despatches we highlighted more than 20 major new roleplaying releases that we're looking forward to in 1996 and that number keeps growing and growing.

So don't listen to the gloom merchants, there have been some unfortunate changes in the gaming world in the last couple of months, but there are too many people happily involved in the hobby for it to suffer any long term damage from this.

Steve Faragher
Editor

In both cases, there is hope that the games affected will be picked up by other companies. For the full story on Wizards of the Coast, turn to page 8. The GDW news is covered on page 12.



DESPATCHES

CARD SHARKS?

Wizards of the Coast was one of the most highly regarded members of the games community. Until in a shock move last month it suddenly announced that it was ditching all its roleplaying lines.

Despite its decision, Wizards of the Coast is predicting that 1996 will be its strongest year to date, and the greatest year ever for the adventure gaming industry as a whole.

Editorial comment on page 7. We'd love to hear your opinions - write to us at the normal address (see page 94).

WIZARDS OF THE COAST has dropped its roleplaying games. In an official statement made last month, the company announced that from now on it intends to concentrate its efforts on the incredibly successful Deckmaster series of games – *Magic: The Gathering, Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* and the forthcoming *Cyberpunk 2020*-based *Netrunner.*

"Creating great new games, like the Deckmaster series, is clearly what we do best," said CEO and President Peter Adkison. "To do this effectively, we need to focus our energy and resources in the Deckmaster line and new product areas. To accomplish this, we have decided to discontinue some of our smaller products, including our roleplaying games. This was a very difficult strategic business decision to make. We are not abandoning these products or their fans, and are looking for new publishers for the roleplaying games."

Later, in a more personal statement, Adkison explained the decision more fully. "We have taken a good hard look at ourselves and we have decided to cut loose some areas," he said.

"We are pretty much saying good bye to the roleplaying genre, at least for now. This is very hard for us, particularly for me specifically. I founded Wizards of the Coast with the dream of building a great roleplaying game company that would discover the RPG that would break out of the RPG industry and bring more

"We have decided to discontinue some of our smaller products, including our roleplaying games"
Peter Adkison

gamers to roleplaying. The company's first book was *The Primal Order,* a book that I authored and am immensely proud of. But I have come to the conclusion that if anyone is going to do something great and innovative with RPGs, it'll probably be someone else. I bow from the field.

"Note that I do not look at this as a disservice to RPGs. I think we *were* doing a disservice to RPGs by not giving them adequate support. We simply do not seem to be able to do a great job in the RPG business. We have never admitted this before, but we have lost money on every single roleplaying product we've ever published, from *The Primal Order* and *Talislanta* all the way up until now with *Ars Magica* and *Everway.* But no matter how much you love an industry, if you can't make money at it eventually you have to walk away from it and let others carry the torch."

Reaction to the news has been mixed, with gamers expressing feelings ranging from disgust to disbelief. The news also seems to have come as a shock to many Wizards of the Coast staff.

Other affected departments are Book Publishing, Table Games and Events. Book publishing will be dropped entirely – the intention is to work with major publishing companies instead. *Roborally* and *Great Dalmuti* will continue to be supported, but no new releases in this area are planned for the time being. The events side of the company will be greatly expanded, though, using profits from the card games.

Despite much speculation on the financial status of the company, Wizards of the Coast has reported record profits for the last year. The move has meant the loss of around 30 jobs in both the US and Europe, from the company's current staff of around 275 people.

All is not lost...

The future of the *Magic: The Gathering* roleplaying system remains unclear at this point, although judging from the official statements it seems unlikely that the game will see the light of day any time soon. **arcane** remains hopeful, however, that it will be released at some point in the future.

Knights in shining armour?

Although Wizards of the Coast is discontinuing its roleplaying systems, the company claims that it does not intend to simply abandon them.

"My overriding priority in the area of RPGs is to make sure that our existing lines find good homes," said Adkison. "Our main priority will not be how much money we can make from the divestiture, but whether or not the company taking over the line will give them the love and attention they deserve."

Already, several companies have expressed an interest in one or more of the lines. Although no final decisions have been made, **arcane** has managed to track down the following information. Look out for more news in coming issues.

Ars Magica

Originally published by White Wolf, this game of mediaeval wizards seems to have attracted the most attention from potential buyers. To start with, a group of ex-WotC staff – including Wade Racine, former developer for the system – has put in a proposal to take on the game, using it to form the basis of a new roleplaying company.

Jeff Tidball of Atlas Games has also confirmed his company's involvement. "We've expressed interest in picking up both *Ars Magica* and *Everway*," he says. "At the present, we haven't heard from Wizards of the Coast on the status of either of those proposals. I wish I could tell you more, because that would mean that we knew more".

Steve Jackson Games is also a potential buyer. "We'd be quite interested in *Ars Magica* if neither Wade nor Atlas could pick it up," Steve Jackson told us, "but we think they should have first chance at it."

It's also been rumoured that a group of staff still working within WotC has put forward a proposal for the creation of a subsidiary company that would remain within the umbrella of WotC to handle *Ars Magica*, although details are sketchy at the moment.

The 4th edition of *Ars Magica* was delayed for over a year. It looks like fans won't have to wait much longer.

Everway

As well as Atlas Games (see *Ars Magica*), Pagan Publishing – best known for its independent *Call Of Cthulhu* supplements – is also bidding for the recently released diceless system. "Pagan Publishing has put in a proposal to take on production of *Everway*," said John Tynes. "We've been looking for our own roleplaying game for a while, but we're a tough crowd to please. *Everway* is a terrific game, and we're confident we can do it justice and perhaps even do things WotC didn't consider doing. In addition, I was on the design team for *Everway* back when I was at WotC, and I'd love to stay involved with the game."

Everway received a mixed response on its release, but several companies have expressed an interest in it.

SLA Industries

Although various companies are said to be interested in this dark game of futuristic horror, the strongest proposal has come from a group made up of the Nightfall Games partners (original publishers of the game) and members of the WotC design team. Considering the game's wealth of background material, the group feels that it is the best suited to continue supporting the system.

> "The people who play **SLA** have been absolutely wonderful in their support so far, and we'd like to thank them."
>
> Anne Boylan

"We are presently in discussion," said Anne Boylan, one of the founders of Nightfall Games, "considering the option of starting a new company to support the *SLA Industries* line. The people who play *SLA* have been absolutely wonderful in their support so far, and we'd like to thank them."

Whatever happens, Peter Adkison has been quoted as saying that David Allsop, the game's designer, will have the final say on what the outcome will be for *SLA Industries*.

Will Nightfall Games reform to continue publishing *SLA Industries*? No decision has been made so far.

A big month in the North

Games Workshop just don't seem able to stop working.

THOSE INDUSTRIOUS CHAPS at Games Workshop are mobilising all resources. Imminent is the release of *Outlanders*, the new *Necromunda* supplement that takes the homeboys into the Underhive.

This boxed set contains a tower, lift, observation platform and fortifications for walkways. There are extensive new campaign rules, which include the sub-contracting of gangs to perform dirty work for the hive authorities. Thus, gangs may be sent on mutie clearing missions or xeno-hunts, where they may meet Genestealers, Chaos Marines or rogue Eldar. New characters may also be hired, like the Wyrd Psykers, who have the power to control the unpleasant, native nasties of the underhive, such as Millisaws and Ripperjacks – flying facehuggers.

Outlanders weighs in at £17.99 and is due out on February 5th. Look out for the review next issue.

In late January, the diabolical Chaos Gods will bestow upon their minions the gift of Egrimm Van Horstmann, a Tzeentchian Sorcerer astride a massive, two-headed Chaos Dragon. However, the Dark Powers will exact a hefty toll of £24.99 for his services.

Meanwhile, there is ominous news for players of *Warhammer Quest*, the game of mugging monsters and nicking their valuables. Apparently, the warrior pack series of supplements are now effectively limited editions; Games Workshop will produce no more once current stocks are exhausted.

There is major activity on the *40K* front however, as the Predator battle tank is due for a well-deserved overhaul. The mark 2 Predator is a metal/plastic hybrid model in the same manner as the Whirlwind and Razorback. Weapon options include side sponson heavy bolters, turret-mounted autocannon and the luxury model has 4 lascannon!

The first special character joining the Blood Angels on their blood-letting spree will be the Sanguinary Priest Corbulo, with the Standard Bearer Brother Bethnor entering the Dark Angels' ranks in late January/early-February. February will also see the release of Mordian Iron Guard heavy weapon teams and the quintessential Imperial Guard commander, Captain Chenkov; a warrior who's at his best with his army collapsing all around him.

However, with the batting order already established for the next couple of Codexes (Chaos then Imperial Agents), the big question is: what will the next *40K* race be?

The leading candidates must be the Space Slann or Dark Eldar (as revealed in **arcane** 1). However there is 'another one'. Games Workshop designers have divulged details of a new threat to the Imperium described as 'a Borg-like entity.' These creatures are intergalactic Space Zombies that cannibalise machinery and flesh in order to sustain their unnatural bodies. Evidence for the existence of these aberrations of nature can be found on page 23 of White Dwarf 193. Just to the right of Andy Chamber's head is a concept sketch (magnification may be required) which reveals the terrifying dimensions of these horrid organisms.

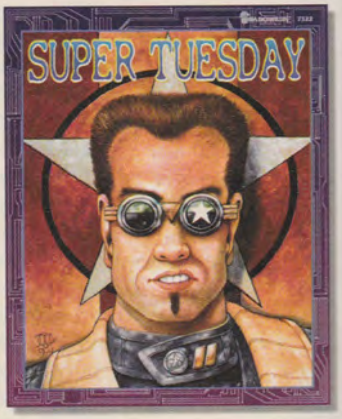
Remember: forewarned is forearmed.

Meet the numerous nasties of the Underhive in Games Workshop's new *Necromunda* supplement: *Outlanders*. Out in February.

COMING SOON

Super Tuesday

Shadowrun joins the campaign trail.



SINCE THE ORIGINAL release of *Shadowrun* in 1989, FASA have continued to develop the game's Sixth World setting via supplements, adventures and novels.

However, one area has always been skipped: politics. Considering the ripe opportunities for dirty tricks and shadowy business presented by your average modern government, you'd have thought that those of the 2050s would be bursting with potential work for your average shadowrunner.

And you'd have been right. 2057 is an election year for the United Canadian and American States, and marks a whole new storyline for the game.

The first book in the Election Of 2057 range, *Super Tuesday* is a collection of five related adventures that can be used individually or together, to form a mini-campaign. Also included in the book will be details on the UCAS government, political parties and election procedures.

There are five candidates running for president, and that means there're lots of nasty secrets to discover and vicious rumours to spread. Of course, such activities are not without their dangers, especially when you consider that one of the candidates is the Great Western Dragon and sometime media celebrity, Dunkelzhan.

Super Tuesday will be released by the FASA Corporation in April, priced at around £10.

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Famous for 15 minutes

MORE POPULAR REPRESENTATION of roleplaying has been sighted. We had corroborated reports concerning Christmas Eve TV cop-show *Taggart* e-mailed to us by Andy Anderson (Andy.Anderson@pa-consulting.com) and Matt Lewis (lewis@post.griffin.co.uk). They weren't the only two who saw the grumpy Scots detective's sidekick play *D&D* as part of a murder inquiry, but they were the first two to tell us about it (the wonders of e-mail, we guess).

"Although it appeared to start off a bit anti," Andy reports, "that turned out to be part of the plot and they'd obviously done some reasonable research. I thought we got quite a good ride in the end."

One by-play particularly caught the ear of our monitors. At the end of a bit about 'taking it all too seriously'...

Taggart: "What's it all about?" (or some such)

Sidekick: "... intellectual stimulation... roleplaying."

Taggart: "Give me Snakes and Ladders any day..."

Nice to see the hobby being treated as ordinary. We'll e-mail both Andy and Matt a fashionable **arcane** T-shirt the very day technology permits.

Meanwhile, if anyone notices other examples of roleplaying in popular culture, will you let us know?

Write in to us at
15 Minutes, arcane,
30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW
and be clothed...

GDW GO DOWN

One of the oldest games companies turns belly up.

GAME DESIGNERS' WORKSHOP, publisher of *Traveller, Twilight 2000* and *Space 1889*, has ceased trading. In an announcement made on the 5th of January a spokesperson said that they would stop selling games on January 19th and expect to shut down completely by the end of February.

Games Designers' Workshop was founded in 1973 to launch *Traveller*, the first mainstream Science Fiction roleplaying game. The impressive list of games that they have published over the years includes *Twilight 2000, Space 1889, Johnny Reb, Harpoon* and the ill-fated *Dangerous Journeys.*

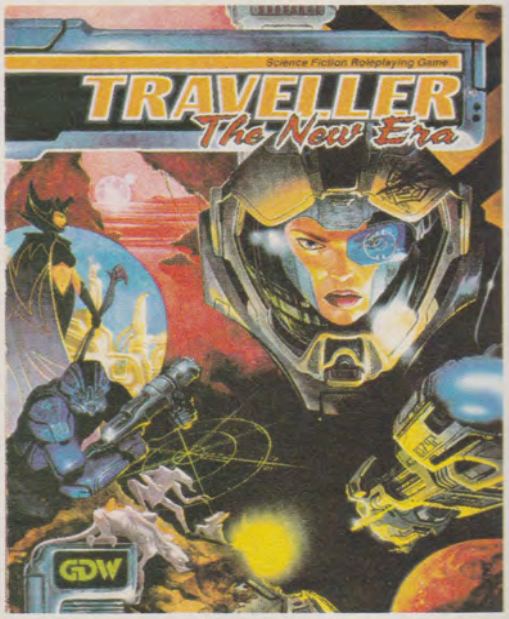
The news of its closure, while shocking, has surprised few in the gaming industry. GDW had been under increasing financial pressure during the last five years and by the time of the announcement there were only two full-time staff left.

GDW's president Frank Chadwick said of the failure: "It's not because the market failed. We failed the market. We didn't adapt to the changes".

The reasons behind GDW's financial disarray are not difficult to trace. The latest edition of *Traveller*, entitled *Traveller: The New Era*, was not as well received as the company had hoped and didn't sell in the sort of volume that could justify the large costs involved in such a major overhaul.

GDW also lost a legal battle to TSR over the game *Dangerous Journeys. Dangerous Journeys* was designed by *Dungeons & Dragons* co-creator Gary Gygax for GDW. When he parted company with TSR Gary Gygax had agreed not to design any competing games and *Dangerous Journeys* was adjudged in court to have broken that agreement. Unfortunately for GDW this meant surrendering all their stock of the game to TSR with no chance of getting any return on the money they'd spent developing it.

Editorial comment on page 7.



The unpopular *Traveller: The New Era* was never the success it needed to be.

WHITHER NOW?

So what will become of Traveller and Space 1889 in the aftermath of the closure?

GDW are hoping that the end of the company doesn't mean the end of the games. According to Susan Shug, one of the two staff left, they'll do everything they can to find homes for their games. As of the moment, the ownership of all the games has reverted to the original designers but there're plenty of moves afoot to make sure that they don't go out of print.

TRAVELLER
The New Era

Marc Miller, the inventor of *Traveller* has ambitious plans to re-work the rules and effectively re-launch *Traveller.* He also wants to extend the concept behind *Traveller* into other media, most significantly card and computer games.

His plans may conflict with Steve Jackson's. Not the British Steve Jackson who collaborated on the *Fighting Fantasy* books all those years ago, but the American Steve Jackson, head of Steve Jackson Games and publisher of *GURPS* and *INWO.* He has clearly signalled that he would happily take on *Traveller* and *Space:1889* as well, provided of course that he could strike a deal. If he were to sign them, they would most probably become supplements for the highly successful *GURPS.* As for the other games, well, we'll just have to wait and see. Expect more news next month.

COMING SOON

Middle Earth: The Wizards

Do hobbits play cards?

Iron Crown Enterprises, purveyors of the subtle and profound *Rolemaster* game and the simplified but by no means simple *Middle Earth Roleplaying System*, are getting in on the collectable card game craze.

Set in Tolkien's fantastic world, *Middle Earth: The Wizards* looks likely to be a big hit. Its limited edition incarnation – 45 million cards – has already sold out; a more general release is scheduled for early April.

It's a game for two to five players. Each player takes on the role of one of the five wizards sent to Middle Earth by the Valar to aid in the struggle against Sauron. Forbidden from matching their power directly against that of the Dark Lord, the wizards must persuade the free peoples of the world around to their way of thinking. The wizards differ in their methods, and so are effectively competing with each other.

Unlike many similar games, *Wizards* places more emphasis on strategy than tactics. Allies have to be marshalled into companies, terrain has to be negotiated, resources collected and corrupting influences resisted (put that ring away, Frodo). Combat does occur, not directly between wizards' forces but rather between a wizard's company and a 'hazard' (the dragon in the Lonely Mountain, for instance)

As you would expect, the cards are adorned with sumptuous artwork; they also feature quoted snippets from the great books themselves. And yes, a preliminary look at the game suggests that ICE have made the rules comfortably complex.

We'll be reviewing *Middle Earth: The Wizards* next month.

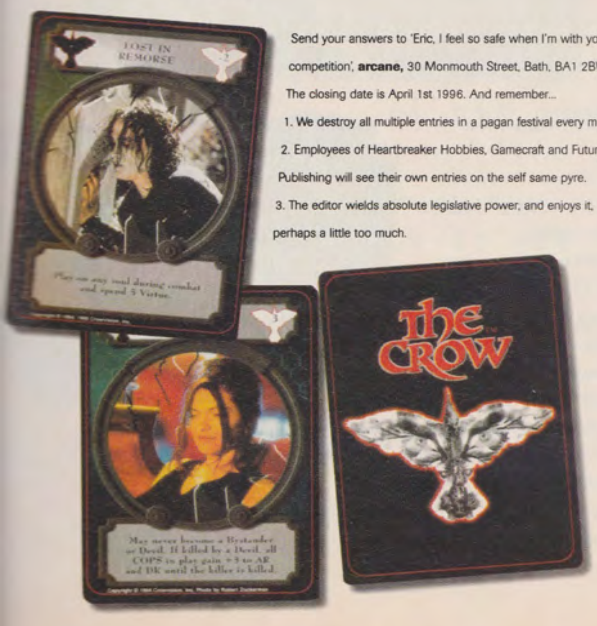
Something to crow about

In conjunction with this month's review of Heartbreaker's new 'Collectable Card Game of Gothic Tragedy' *The Crow* (see page 77), British distributors Gamecraft of Liverpool have generously supplied us with five complete display boxes of thirty-six masterpacks to give away as competition prizes. Each masterpack has fifteen cards, so that's enough cards to get nine people playing, we reckon.

win! arcane COMPETITION in association with Gamecraft of Liverpool

To win one, and we mean an entire box, simply answer this question:

Who was the leader of the gang that killed the Crow's girlfriend? And yes, fact fans, they did use the same name in both the comic and the film...



Send your answers to 'Eric, I feel so safe when I'm with you competition', **arcane,** 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW. The closing date is April 1st 1996. And remember...

1. We destroy all multiple entries in a pagan festival every moon.
2. Employees of Heartbreaker Hobbies, Gamecraft and Future Publishing will see their own entries on the self same pyre.
3. The editor wields absolute legislative power, and enjoys it, perhaps a little too much.

Faster, meaner, smarter...

Win a copy of *Virtual Realities 2.0* and *Awakenings: New Magic in 2057.*

THE SIXTH WORLD OF FASA'S *Shadowrun* stands still for no one. New technology and applications for magic continue to be developed all the time, and just keeping up with the state of the art can be a full time job for any budding shadow team.

However, thanks to the wonderful people at FASA, 10 lucky readers will have no trouble staying on top of the latest developments in 2057, because we'll be sending them copies of *Virtual Realities 2.0* (reviewed on page 66) and *Awakenings: New Magic In 2057* (reviewed next month).

To win yourself a copy of each of these new *Shadowrun* sourcebooks, just answer the following questions:

Shadowrun's cyberdecks use ASIST interfaces to translate digital information into a form that the human brain can comprehend. What does ASIST stand for?

The published findings of which two researchers forms the basis for the scientific understanding of magic in the Shadowrun universe?

On what date is the Sixth World generally agreed to have started, and what event on that day signalled its beginning?

SEND YOUR ANSWERS ON A POSTCARD TO:
'God, I hate the technology curve competition'
arcane, Future Publishing Ltd, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW, England.
Or E-mail them to arcane@futurenet.co.uk, making sure that the subject line reads 'God, I hate the technology curve'.

THE SMALL PRINT

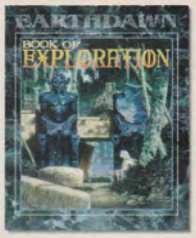
Only one application per person, please – we *will* notice multiple entries, and Lone Star Security will be notified of the offender's address.
The closing date for entries is 29 February.
Employees of Future Publishing Ltd and FASA Corp are not permitted to enter, no matter how hard they try.
The Editor's decision is, as always, final. No correspondence will be entered into and so on and so forth...

COMING SOON

Legends Of Earthdawn 2

Discover past heroes...

THE GREAT LIBRARY OF THROAL has whole shelves full of books, scrolls, stone tablets and other records detailing the exploits of heroes from ages past. Tales of lost civilisations, forgotten treasures and powerful magic items share space with the histories of troll sky raiders, insane wizards and unstoppable warriors.



Legends Of Earthdawn 2: The Book Of Exploration collects together more than 20 such chronicles, giving an insight into the history of the land of Barsaive and the figures that helped shape the present. In addition, the book includes adventure ideas inspired by each story, and a system for creating complete scenarios based on these tales and other like them.

Legends Of Earthdawn 2: The Book Of Exploration will be released by FASA in April.

Buy! Buy! Buy!

Complete your collection...

Have your credit card ready and call our hotline on 01225 822511 or fill in the form.

If you've only just discovered how good **arcane** is, you'll be relieved to discover that the first two issues are still available from us at the extremely reasonable price of just £3 each, including postage and packing.

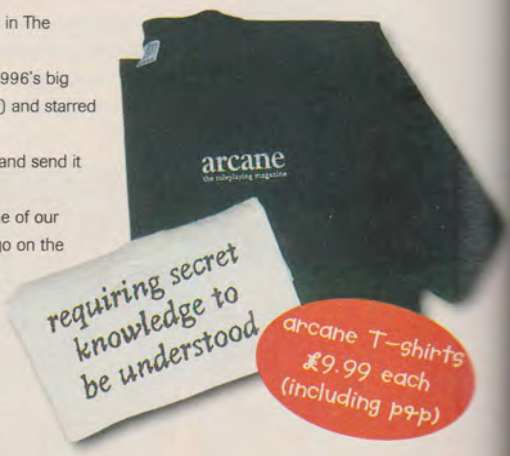
Issue 1 featured the games *Shadowfist* and *Feng Shui*, had an excellent beginner's guide to *Magic* deck construction, started the Worlbuilder guide and had strange goings on down in The Laboratory.

Issue 2 explored *AD&D: Skills & Powers*, previewed 1996's big releases, interviewed Richard Garfield (*Magic*'s inventor) and starred The Golden Dragon Inn, a 16-page Encounters special.

To order either of these just fill in the form below and send it off with your money. It couldn't be easier.

AND! be the smartest geek on the block with one of our rather dandy **arcane** T-shirts. With a tastefully small logo on the front and the legend 'requiring secret knowledge to be understood' on the back, these stylish items of apparel can be worn freely in discos, pubs, clubs, work or in bed.

They come in large and extra-large and black or white and are made from 100% cotton. Don't forget to specify what size and colour you want when ordering.



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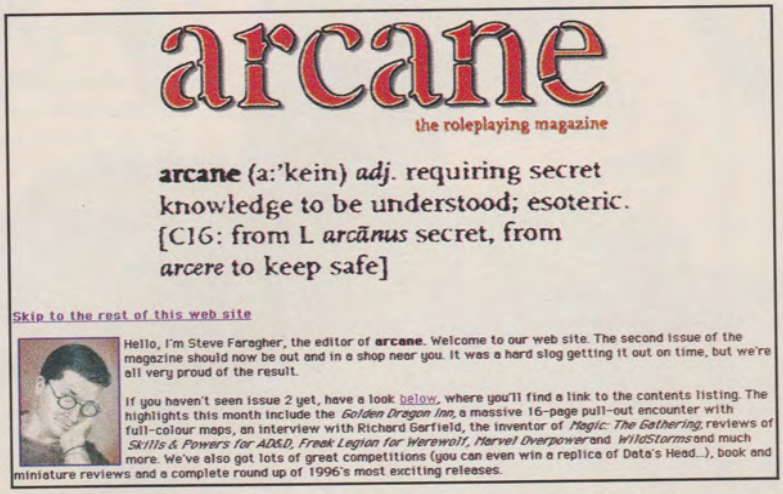
infinity beckons...

Our regular round up of all things SuperInfoBusStop and Internetty.

Futurenet, Future's Internet site where our home pages are situated now has a silly password system. We're sorry about that, but please do persevere and get in touch with us.


arcane
the roleplaying magazine
arcane (a:'kein) adj. requiring secret knowledge to be understood; esoteric. [C16: from L arcānus secret, from arcere to keep safe]
Skip to the rest of this web site
Hello, I'm Steve Faragher, the editor of arcane. Welcome to our web site. The second issue of the magazine should now be out and in a shop near you. It was a hard slog getting it out on time, but we're all very proud of the result.
If you haven't seen issue 2 yet, have a look below, where you'll find a link to the contents listing. The highlights this month include the Golden Dragon Inn, a massive 16-page pull-out encounter with full-colour maps, an interview with Richard Garfield, the inventor of Magic: The Gathering, reviews of Skills & Powers for AD&D, Freak Legion for Werewolf, Marvel Overpower and WildStorms and much more. We've also got lots of great competitions (you can even win a replica of Data's Head...), book and miniature reviews and a complete round up of 1996's most exciting releases.

Devastating good looks combined with burning passion, natural authority and wit. No, not Steve, the arcane web pages you fool.

arcane is a fully paid-up digi-protagonist of the on-line multimedia revolution. If you want to know exactly what we mean by that, check out our web pages at `http://www.futurenet.co.uk/` and take a look. We're currently offering a number of services for roleplayers eager to communicate, including reader ads and contacts, and we think you'll be impressed.

The rest of the site

The arcane Forum
Share your views on roleplaying – its past, present, future and anything else you feel like talking about – with us and other gamers.

Contacts
Having trouble finding gamers in your area? Our Contacts page is designed to help you get in touch, wherever you live.

Reader Ads
Looking for an out of print Traveller supplement? Want to sell that incredibly rare Magic: The Gathering card you just acquired? Post a message here.

arcane Wants You!
If you're a writer or an artist and you're interested in working for **arcane** as a freelancer, we want to hear from you.

arcane links
Take a look at some of the best sites from all around the world and some of the worst from Norwich.

THE MORE WE DELVE into it, the more we're convinced that the Internet is a roleplayer's paradise. The incredible wealth of gaming information waiting on the other side of that modem is almost overwhelming.

But that's where **arcane** comes in. Whether you're a novice or casual acquaintance of the Internet and thus in need of a guide, or an old hand looking for new places, we're eager to be your metal detector on the treasure-laden beach of gaming on the web.

There's an awful lot of good stuff out there, and we want to make sure it gets noticed. If you know or run a site that deserves recognition, tell us about it and we'll add it to our list of links just as soon as the hideous constraints of Old Father Time allow us to.

The Forum

If you haven't looked at our Forum recently then you'll be missing debates on 'realism in roleplaying', 'miniatures and whether or not you should use them' and many others. It's quite straightforward: when you've read what other contributors have to say, you can post your own opinions for everyone else to read, join in a conversation, start an argument or propose a new topic.

WE ALSO OFFER the following exciting options:

The arcane survey - tell us what you thought of arcane and you'll help us to shape future issues. If you think we're not catering for your playing tastes, let us know.

Contacts - our service is designed to put you in touch with other gamers in your locale: look for a club or advertise yourself to an existing group in this space.

Links – The fastest-growing section of our site. Large unwieldy lists of inscrutably named websites can be time-consuming, so besides providing the actual links, we also try to give you some indication of what you can expect to find at the other end.

Although it's still in its early stages, **arcane**'s web site is continuously expanding and evolving. Piece by piece we're trying to build the most complete and reliable guide to roleplaying resources on the Internet.

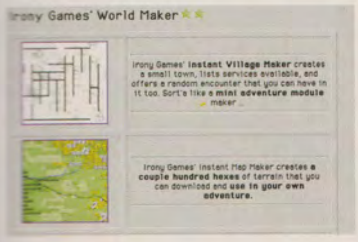
Hot Sites

Where it's at. Whatever it is.

Irony Games

http://www.irony.com/webdice.html

We like this site a lot. Offering such useful services as an on-line dice roller (no, really: type in the number and kind of dice you'd like to have virtually rolled for you and the result

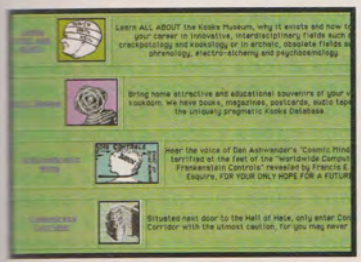

Irony Games' World Maker
Irony Games' Instant Village Maker creates a small town, lists services available, and offers a random encounter that you can have in it too. Sort's like a mini adventure module maker.
Irony Games' Instant Map Maker creates a couple hundred hexes of terrain that you can download and use in your own adventure.

will come shooting back across the ether at you) as well as village, clearing and cavern random generators for your games, Irony Games have hit the requirements of the net-borne host of roleplayers firmly on the head. As if that weren't enough, there're also facilities for creating campaign calenders and plotting the course of your world's moons so that you can accurately predict the next outbreak of lycanthropy in your local village. And all done with a splendid sense of humour that's, well, ironic.

Kook Museum

http://www.teleport.com/~dkossy/

You know how when you're looking for specific information on the net you always get hopelessly sidetracked and end up finding out far more about the sex life of the platypus than you ever wanted to know in the first place? Well now you can be saved all that endless searching by just paying a visit to The Kook



Museum, a collection of the weird and wonderful. We're not even going to try to explain what you'll find here, just heartily recommend that you go and have a look.

Theatre des Vampires

http://users.aol.com/mishian/nosferatu/TdV.html

This genuinely strange place features some fan pages for Anne Rice, a comprehensive list of links to other vampire-related sites across the net and all you need to know to join The Vampire Society.

We suggest that you invest in a large cross and chew healthily large amounts of garlic before pointing your browser in the direction of these pages.

PlainLabel

http://www.evansville.net:80/~guymc/PlainLab.html

PlainLabel is a company that produces its very own roleplaying system and from this home

page you can download it for free. The site also features lots of support material for the game and links to other similiar ventures around the net. Essential material for the games designing enthusiast.

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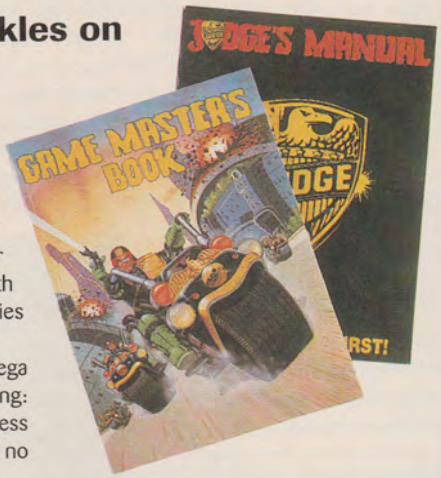
RETRO

Judge Dredd:

The Roleplaying Game

First published by Games Workshop in 1984 – now out of print

In the second in our series of retrospectives looking at the finest roleplaying games ever, Paul Pettengale buckles on his shoulder-pads and dons his helmet, taking to the streets as a Judge in Dredd's very own RPG...



The boxed set contains cardboard figures and floor maps for use with the game, and Citadel Miniatures released a series of metal Judge Dredd figures.

Games Workshop also released two scenario modules and a Companion. *Judgement Day* features the return of Chief Judge Caligula, while *Slaughter Margin* deals with a threat to the entire city. The hard-backed Companion is packed with new rules and scenarios.

IT WAS THE GAME that had to happen. Mega City One, home of the most popular comic book anti-hero, was the perfect setting for an RPG – a diverse conglomeration of nefarious criminals, all clamouring for their own five-minute stint of glory.

Players take on the role of Judges who cleanse the streets of scum, solve bizarre crimes and shoot off their mouths as much as their guns.

It's fast, it's frenetic, and it's more than a little fraught; but above all, *Judge Dredd: The Roleplaying Game* is – or at least was – damned good fun.

Quite why it was discontinued is beyond me. Dredd and the *2000AD* comic that spawned him are probably even more popular now than they were back then. Since the Hollywood movie was released, Judge Dredd and his world have grown massively in popularity. So why, we are all asking, doesn't someone reprint and re-release the roleplaying game?

Perhaps one of the things that put players off (or, at least, those players who didn't actually try it) was a fear that it might be tricky to play simply because of the Judges – stern, unbending arms of the Law.

As someone who played through a five-year campaign of the game, I can vouch for the fact that this simply isn't a problem. In fact, the restriction of the Judges' character actually encourages roleplaying – it gives you a basis from which to shape a truly individual character. Those of you familiar with the comic strip may remember Judges Hershey and Anderson, both of whom had distinct personalities quite unlike that of Dredd.

Equally, the diversity of the Mega City One setting might be intimidating: but it presents referees with countless opportunities. For inspiration, look no further than *2000AD*.

The vast range of crimes which the citizens of Mega City One are happy to perpetrate will provide plenty of humourous situations into which player characters can be placed. Play Mega City One as a zany, whacky place and you're guaranteed a positive response from your players.

Alternatively, there's scope to run your campaign as a dark, futuristic game. The film makers chose this angle, adopting a *Blade Runner*-like tone with gangs running riot through the city and heavy clouds of smog hanging over skies thick with traffic.

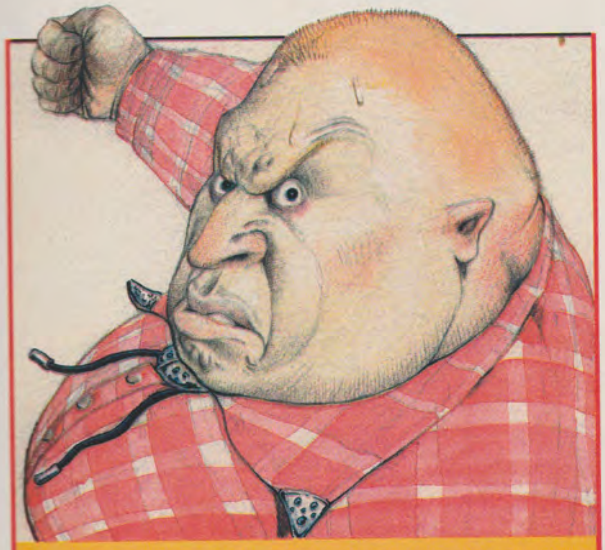
This style, perhaps more in vogue than the strange, silly character of the original cartoon strips, is just as enjoyable. Indeed, a shift in the same direction has been seen in the *2000AD* strip itself.

The mechanics of the RPG are easy to learn and even easier to apply – the system's based on speed, making sure the game trots along at a good pace without getting bogged down in constant rules references. Each player can perform a number of actions per turn, based upon their initiative score. The quicker you are, the more stuff you can do, basically.

Actions include opening a door (two actions), crouching down (one action), aiming (however many actions you like), and firing (one action). Combat is not too deadly, which is just as well, given that firefights are frequent. And there is a host of special abilities which add flavour to the game and act as rewards for players who have gained enough experience.

This was a highly professional (if now slightly outdated) system of game mechanics, and it is still easily the most enjoyable set of rules I've played.

The two rule-books – one each for the player and the ref – flesh out the campaign setting, giving a brief history of Mega City One, its peoples and its many quirks. Both are enjoyable and, like the game itself, they last forever.



Seymour J Clancy III's great outing

This month the choleric crusader has his views vindicated on American late night television...

Ah am not alone. Ah have frayends and cohorts in the media who do assist me in mah STRUGGLE to expose and denounce the corrupt children of the pit who choose to abuse the long winter nahts by communing in the depraved pursuit of DINGOS & DINNER DANCES.

Ah have bin sittin in ma parlour watching re-runs of those fahn GUARDIANS of the MORAL HIGH GROUND that is the television program Saturday NAHT Live, and ah have been witness to the RIGHTEOUS LAMPOONING of ex-"bratpack" boy-next-door sex symbol Emilio Estevez. That this once fahn actor has been party to wilful wickedness and PECCANCY in squandering the nation's resources bah spending his college days in the diabolical dice-orientated pastime of DOORNICE & DARTBOARDS fills me with IRE and ah can only give thanks to the ALMAHTY LORD that he was squarely lambasted by the MORALLY SPINED for his youthful misdemeanours and peccadilloes. It has greatly vexed and perplexed me to discover that our once great nashnul institution of HOLLYWOOD (*Ship* – Ed.)

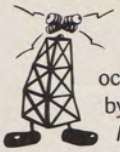
Seymour is much obliged to the Saturday Naht Live team for this information. An **arcane** T-shirt is on its way to them now. They'll appreciate that.

Are there any other famous people you know who play roleplaying or card games? Seymour is always grateful for any information received and is prone to spontaneous acts of great generosity towards those of a morally upstanding, straight-backed nature.

COMING SOON

Kabal

Occult à la carte



Based on the universe of *Nephilim*, the French-language occult RPG translated into English by Chaosium in August 1994, *Kabal* is now the second best selling collectable card game in France, after *Magic: The Gathering*, of course. The first edition of 1.5 million cards sold out last April after less than two months on the shelves.

To follow up this success, MultiSim have now released a revised edition of the starter pack, some 16 card extension packs, and an expansion set called *Daimon*, comprising sets of 8 cards. They are currently looking for an American distributor to release an English-language version of the game. This may prove to be Chaosium, although they are currently concentrating on marketing the CCG *Mythos*.

Alternatively, if you don't want to wait and you reckon you can deal with the few lines of French on each card and work your way through the rule booklet, you could get hold of the original game directly from MultiSim at 20 rue des Rasselins, Paris 20. The starter pack will cost you about 70FF, the boosters are 20FF each, and the *Daimon* supplements retail at 12FF.

From what we've seen, we wish them every success in getting an English version out soon.

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... a big crusher squished one, then there were four.

RoboRally is a fast paced board game for 2–8 players, aged 15 years and upwards

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GARFIELD GAMES

Wizards OF THE COAST

COMING SOON

Albion

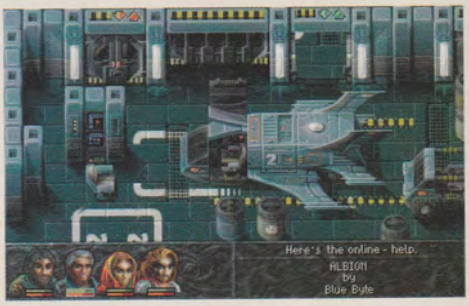
Magic, technology and megacorporations collide in Blue Byte's far future computer game.

Albion's bizarre blend of high technology and fantasy certainly sounds interesting. With great graphics like these, it should be brilliant.

IT'S THE YEAR 2195, and the vast factory sapceship Toronto has arrived at distant star to mine the rich resources believed to exist on the system's third planet. But when pilot Tom Driscoll leads a reconnaissance team to the surface he discovers not the barren desert detailed in the survey data, but a world rich in life, and full of strange effects that can only be described as 'magic'.

DDT, the enormous company that owns the Toronto, decides to continue with its plan to strip the planet of all its valuable minerals regardless. Tom, appalled by the decision, swears to protect the world from the destruction that the company will bring.

In *Albion*, Blue Byte Software's first computer roleplaying game, you play the part of Tom, fighting against his ex-employers to save a world. To succeed you must explore the planet and find the answers to the many mysteries you discover. Combining 2D and 3D graphics, packed full of spells, weapons, characters and a strange races, *Albion* certainly promises a lot. Look out for a full **arcane** review in the near future.



Albion will be released by Blue Byte on PC CD-ROM this summer. No price has been announced yet.

Competition Results

Homelands: Take me home, country roads compo

"Almost heaven", we thought, when Wizards of the Coast asked **arcane** readers to design a card for the *Homelands* expansion set to *Magic: The Gathering* (reviewed in **arcane** 2). They offered prizes for the card designs that could best be incorporated into the rest of the game world. The winners of the 'Take me home, country roads' competition as chosen by Chaz Elliot, head of WotC UK, and our illustrious editor are as follows:

An entire box of 480 *Homelands* booster pack cards is on its way to:

Mr B. A. Moore of Bolton for his entry: 'Seasons'. This ingenious Enchant World card costs 2 Green and 2 other mana to cast and reads: "Put a season counter on Seasons when it is brought into play and during your upkeep. If there is one season counter, all lands are unaffected (Spring). If there are two season counters, all lands produce double mana (Summer). If there are three season counters, all lands are unaffected (Autumn). If there are four season counters, all lands do not give mana (Winter). When there are four counters on Seasons, remove them all." Cunning little devil eh?

We stated quite clearly in the competition instructions that we weren't particularly interested in clever illustrations and stuff like that but David Priestley, one of our runners up, impressed us so much that we thought we'd share his card, the 'Orcish Mime Artist', with you. And given to spontaneous fits of generosity as we are, we thought we'd send David an **arcane** T-shirt on top of his goody bag by way of thanks for bringing a smile to our faces on a particularly rainy day.

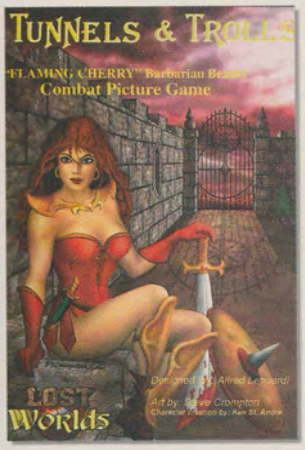
The five runners-up, who will each receive a bag of Wizard goodies, are:

Peter Barnard of Great Yarmouth for 'Goblin Chorus Line' which apparently had the entire WotC UK staff doing the can-can in their office, Richard Boal of Holywood, Northern Ireland for his devious 'Sengir Changeling' one

COMING SOON

Lost Worlds rediscovered

We just looked up and there they were...

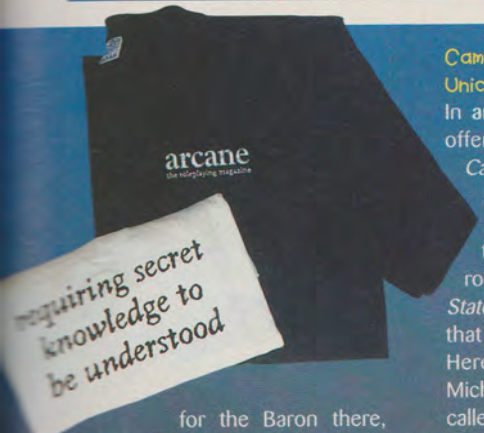


FLYING BUFFALO IS TO REVAMP the *Lost Worlds* picture books, originally published by Nova Games. *Lost Worlds* books form a diceless fantasy combat system for two or more players. They're designed by Alfred Leonardi, the fellow responsible for the excellent *Ace of Aces* air combat game, on which *Lost Worlds* is loosely based.

Each character in the game is defined by its own book. Players each select a character and then go at it hammer and tongs. Maneouvers made by the players are cross-referenced and, with the aid of the books, a narrative is formed. To spice things up, and perhaps to pander to fashion, the books also come with four fantasy cards. Three are related to the character in question – the wizard comes with spell cards, for example – and the fourth is random. Decks of 18 fantasy cards will also be made available.

Four books from Flying Buffalo are due to reach these shores – *the Magical Centaur, the Royal Mummy, the Scorpion Wizard* and *the Female Barbarian* – and four more are in the pipeline. Chessex Manufacturing are also set to release a further four, and Flying Buffalo are encouraging other companies to follow suit.

Flying Buffalo will also be supporting *Lost Worlds* with a bi-monthly newsletter that will clarify rules, announce forthcoming products and tournament results, and so on. Issue 1 provides rules for tournament play. Look out for a review soon.



for the Baron there, Barry Morley of the Wirral for 'Breath of Life', Mark Page of Norwich for the sinister (if slightly too expensive, Mark) 'Death's Hourglass' and David Priestley of Lydney, Gloucestershire for 'Orcish Mime Artist'.

Campaign Cartographer: Unicorn Competition

In **arcane** 1, ProFantasy Software offered copies of *Campaign Cartographer* with the new *City Designer* expansion to five of our readers who knew that: the first ever city-based roleplaying supplement was *City State of the Invincible Overlord*, that the Mappa Mundi is in Hereford Cathedral and that Michael Moorcock's Eternal City is called Tanelorn.

The winners are: Mark Byng of Portsmouth, Chris Payne of Exeter, Michael Phillips of Belfast, Paul Watson of Nottingham and Philip Fenn, a traveller on the information superhighway. Their prizes are on the way.

next month in arcane

The roleplaying magazine

Have you ever had people ask you questions repeatedly? Well we have and next issue we're going to answer some of them. Questions like:

"How do I get into this roleplaying then?"

Which we'll rather brilliantly answer by suggesting some games we think are good to get started with and by asking some top gaming luminaries what they'd recommend.

"What's next month's encounter?"

Well, we're glad you asked that. It's Stormburg, a complete city that lives in the eye of the storm and hops from dimension to dimension.

"That new card game, Middle Earth: The Wizards, is that any good then?"

Well, we suggest you read our scintillating reivew of it.

"Is there anything new out for AD&D?"

Yes, the ultimate dungeon bash, Night Below, for the Underdark world. Expect us to, ahem, delve into it.

"Do you think you can sustain this tenous (and frankly strained) false dialogue to the bottom of the page?"

Yes we do.

"Oh, I see, well in that case is there anything else you'd like to tell me about?"

Yes, we'll have a feature on why acting is a bad thing in roleplaying games, news of the new Dragonlance game and all the usual columns and reviews.

In fact we think that arcane 4's going to be our best yet.

"Right."

We'll see you there then.

Issue 4 of arcane will be on sale Monday the 18th March

The Preface (with Korrekt Spelling)

This is a roleplaying game about life in a British boarding school earlier in the twentieth century. If that sounds like rather a limited scenario, then think of it as a metaphor for something. In fact, many people will tell you that what it is *really* about is Britain's decline in the modern era.

Throw squished tomatoes at such people.

It was inspired by Geoffrey Willans and Ronald Searle's brilliant series of 'Molesworth' books. It requires, ideally, some knowledge of these books, but players should manage without.

This is a comedy game, but it is not pure slapstick. It runs a little slower than some comedy games. The PCs should spend much of their time thinking their way out of situations or passing sarcastic comments. It is often more realistic than most RPGs; there is always someone bigger, nastier, and more powerful than you, and losing fights hurts.

The inspiration for this game is the 'Molesworth' books – *Down With Skool!*, *How to be Topp*, *Whiz for Atomms*, and *Back in the Jug Agane*. These are available separately, or in a single volume, *The Compleet Molesworth*. (The later *Molesworth Rites Again*, by Simon Brett, which shows Molesworth as an adult, was not a great success.)

Note: Earlier versions of this game have been circulated in fanzines and on the Internet. My thanks to everyone who played them and offered ideas, character names and encouragement.

Another Note: The referee in this game is called the 'GM' (Game Master). Other players' characters are 'PCs' or 'boys'. I thought of trying cuter abbreviations, but I decided that this would distract from the simplicity and focus of the game, and I'm happy with traditional terms. I'm also happy to stick with ordinary six-sided dice (D6).

Final Note: All these PCs are male. That's the genre; I'd apologise for the sexism, but actually, I think this picture of male attitudes could be used as feminist propaganda. (As Molesworth himself says: "...gurls hav to put up with boys. So their lot is hard too.")

THE RO

This low, vulgar game ort to be stoped for it teaches the tinies ideas of violence. Shall i therefore tuough them up?

Dedikashun

The Skool Rools is dedicated to the memory of Matthew Arnold of Rugby and all his successors, without whom the British Empire would certainly not be where it is today.

Introducshun

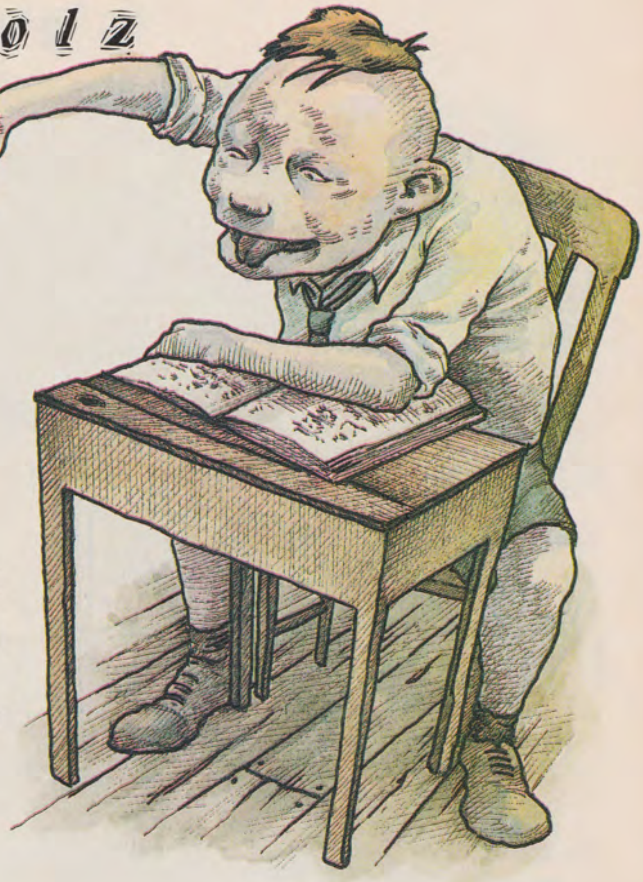
In this game, bold noble and fearless BOYZ (cheers cheers) are confronted by HORRORS fit to terrify HP Lovecraft – to wit, masters, swots, creeps, toadies, bullies, parents, lessons and SKOOL DINNERS.

Players take on the parts of these bold noble (ect) boyz and must survive experiences to chill the BLUDD. (Don't ask if they 'advance'. That would be to accept the system on its own terms, and the ultimate objective is to beat it from within.)

KOOL OLZ

(Also Now Know as Klassrooms & Matrons)

by Phil Masters



Characteristics

Characters are defined by eight characteristics, but not always the same eight. (Some may also have Advantages – see below.)

For BOYS, the eight Characteristics are:
Alertness – Branes – Digestion – Running – Sport – Throw – Tuff – and Lying

For MASTERS, use:
Alertness – Digestion – Kane – Order – Paranoia – Sanity – Stealth – and Throw

Characteristics have numeric values usually in the range 1 to 6, but they may run higher in exceptional circumstances. (Parents, ect, may have Characteristics from either list.)

Boyz' Characteristics

Branes is what is required to do well in klass, impress masters, parents, ect, and generally be a KREEP. Use it with care.

Running is the ability to get away from people with more Tuff than oneself, masters, ect. It may sometimes be opposed to a master's Order to make temporary escapes.

Sport is talent on the foopball pitch, cricket wicket, ect; good for keeping in with hedmasters. Tuff, Running, or Throw may be Substituted (see below), but that is (usually) cheating.

Tuff is a mixture of raw muscle-power, bravado, and low fighting. It is extensively used by boys in inter-personal relationships. It is also often opposed to a master's Kane rating.

Lying is the ability to tell convincing untruths. This is mostly a matter of keeping a straight face, so the Characteristic is also used in other circumstances where bluff is involved. (The content of the lie is largely unimportant; masters would sooner accept a possible untruth than admit to their vast ignorance.)

Shared Characteristics

Alertness governs the chance of noticing things – especially the approach of a master using Stealth. It is also used by boys when trying to move silently themselves (roll Alertness vs Alertness).

Digestion reflects the ability to swallow, and even enjoy, almost anything non-lethal – crucial when faced with SKOOL DINNERS.

Throw is accuracy with hurled chalk, food, ect. The difficulty represented by the target is set by the GM; for a fleeing boy, it will usually be his Running.

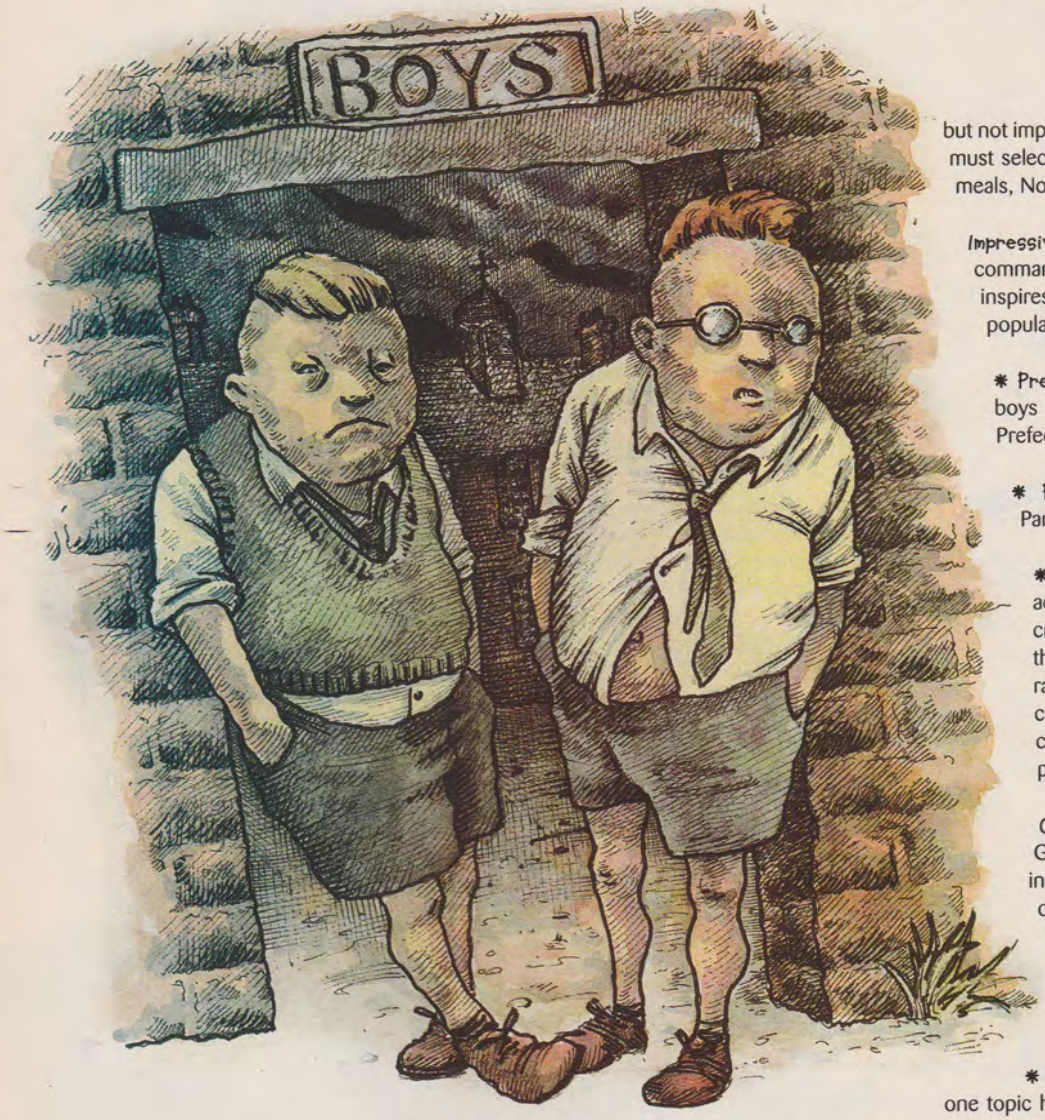
Masters' Characteristics

Kane is a Characteristic beloved of masters. It reflects not only combat ability with the single-stick, but a general aptitude for inflicting controlled, telling pain and humiliation. Successful use of Kane vs a boy's Tuff gives a psychological advantage, and an extra dice or so, against that boy for a period of the GM's choosing.

Order is the indefinable, inexplicable but essential ability to keep boys under control. Without it, a master is DOOMED.

Paranoia reflects a master's understanding of the nature of boys. It is most often used in opposition to Lying, and to spot cheating. →

Extra inspiration: 'St Trinian's', created by Ronald Searle and Timothy Shy (in cartoons and a book); *Tomkinson's Schooldays*, an episode of Michael Palin and Terry Jones' TV series *Ripping Yarns*; Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays*; Terry Pratchett's *Pyramids* (which includes a fantasy parody of Tom Brown); lightweight school stories of this century like the 'Billy Bunter' and 'Jennings' books, by Frank Richards and Anthony Buckeridge respectively; and Richmal Crompton's 'William' stories, recently televised.



Sanity is a measure of the master's ability to relate to the universe – not just boyz (large though they loom), but anything else that he has to deal with. Boyz soon recognise masters with low Sanity.

Stealth is the useful talent of approaching boys without being noticed. As they are almost invariably UP TO something, this is essential for a master who lacks Paranoia.

Advantages

These are attributes that can assist a boy or master. GMs and players may, if they wish, invent others. Those marked with an asterisk (*) may be taken repeatedly; they should be noted with the number of 'levels', as in 'Rich Parents 3'.

Boys

Countenance of Rare Charm: for characters with high Tuff, this merely gives popularity with parents. With others, it leads to... well, look at DERE fotherington-tomas (hullo clouds hullo sky).

* Immune to a Skool Rule: as possessed by School Bully in *Tomkinson's Schooldays* – hard to justify for lesser characters, but not impossible. (It may represent an excuse note.) The player must select the rule: Not running in corridors, Having to finish meals, Not having unmarried Filipino women in his room...

Impressive Parent: the boy has a parent whose name commands respect – as distinct from mere wealth, which just inspires jealousy. However irritating a tick may be, they are popular if their pater is an airline pilot, racing driver, ect.

* Prefecture: gives the boy the right to boss around other boys (as well as the inclination). Prefecture 1 is a House Prefect, 2 is a Skool Prefect, 3 is Hed of Skool.

* Rich Parents: good for annoying other boys. Rich Parents 1 means well-off, 2 is filthy rich, 3 means royalty.

* Specialisation: the boy is particularly talented at one academic subject or sport (defined during character creation). For each level of this Advantage, DOUBLE the boy's effective Branes or Sport in that one area, or raises it to 4, whichever is better. GMs should be very careful of players with personal knowledge of chemistry who take it as a Specialisation. (The playtester who inspired this warning knows who he is.)

Can Tuff Up Masters: not a common Advantage, and GMs will usually disallow it. Normally, boys have an innate inability to engage in melée combat with their oppressors. However, characters like School Bully may use their Tuff against the master's Kane.

Masters

* Extra Subjects: a master who can teach more than one topic has extra income (unless the hedmaster outwits him) and a psychological advantage. Of course, some hedmasters trick staff members who haven't got this Advantage into taking extra classes anyway (usually for a pittance).

Outside Income: the ability to earn money elsewhere saves a master from the worst psychological stresses of his job ("I don't have to do this – I have my whelk stall...").

* Rank: or professional status. Rank 1 is Senior Master, 2 is Hedmaster. Skools can only have one hedmaster, as members of the species fight bitterly when they meet. (Inter-skool sports are a form of ritualised combat designed to channel the excess energy of combative hedmasters.)

Sports Kar: this not only allows a master to escape the boys at weekends, it also helps his popularity with them; boys are suckers for techno-flash.

Disadvantages

Enemy: someone (usually, but not necessarily, an NPC) is the character's implacable enemy. This may be a master or boy.

General Disdain: a character with this Disadvantage is widely despised; ask fotherington-thomas. It can be based on other

← Unlike most RPG settings, physical violence in *The Skool Roolz* is not intended to cause injury or death. Rather, the results are psychological. Because of this, the consequences of combat or the kane are loosely defined. The game demands honest roleplaying; boys should spend much of their time working out how to avoid pain, and if they suffer it, their primary concern, from then on, should be to avoid a repetition.

Characteristics or Advantages, or result from, say, a silly name, or an infamous parent.

Face Like a Squished Tomato: grounds for mockery. Enuff said.

Phobic Response: this causes the sufferer to behave in an uncontrolled fashion, howling like a wolf, gibbering, ect, in one circumstance. For example, a boy might scream with horror at the sight of algebra, or freeze solid when batting against a fast bowler.

Scholarship Oik: the boy's parents are relatively poor, but he has swung a scholarship of some kind. This implies a lack of pocket-money, and disdain from snobbish contemporaries.

...or anything else that the GM allows – use your imagination. (Masters may have Disadvantages, although these are rarely worth detailing. Face Like a Squished Tomato and General Disdain are common; the latter mostly applies to masters with the bad taste to be foreign, junior, or responsible for eccentric subjects such as art.)

Character-Building

This is something that masters often claim that their appalling behaviour encourages. It is also necessary for the game. There are two methods:

Random Method

The key feature of skool life is an utter unfairness in the nature of things that would make a *Paranoia* player blench, so random character creation seems the most natural thing...

1. Roll 1D6 for each Characteristic.

2. Take 1D6-2 (minimum 0) random Advantages. (Dropping 'Can Tuff Up Masters' from the Advantages described gives a list to roll 1D6 against.)

3. Take 1D6-3 (minimum 0) Disadvantages likewise. (Five are listed; re-roll or invent your own on a 6.)

Points Assignment

Alternatively; each character starts with 50 points, plus 5 for each Disadvantage accepted. Player characters must have at least 1 in any Characteristic, and cannot exceed 6 without special GM permission. Characteristics cost 2 points per +1 up to a value of 5, and 3 points for each +1 thereafter. Advantages cost 5 points each (or 5 points per level of Advantage, where applicable).

Example: potts major hav Tuff 4 (8 pts), Running 2 (4 pts), Throw 6 (13 pts), Branes 2 (4 pts), Lying 6 (13 pts), Alertness 1 (2 pts), Digestion 1 (2 pts), Sport 2 (4 pts), Prefecture 1 (House Prefect: 5 pts), and a special Disadvantage; their mother hav instructed him to take good care of potts minor, who is a snekey little swot (–5 pts). Total: 50 pts.

Combat & Skills Use

Most actions are resolved the same way under the *Skool Rools* (and that doesn't just mean violence).

The GM determines the most appropriate Characteristic, and the player rolls a number of D6s equal to its value. The total of the roll is then compared to the action's Difficulty Value; which is either the opponent's roll, or a value arbitrarily assigned by the GM (if the 'opponent' is simply the perversity of the universe).

- A roll which beats the Difficulty Value by 6+ is a Complete Success, granting all the benefits of victory.

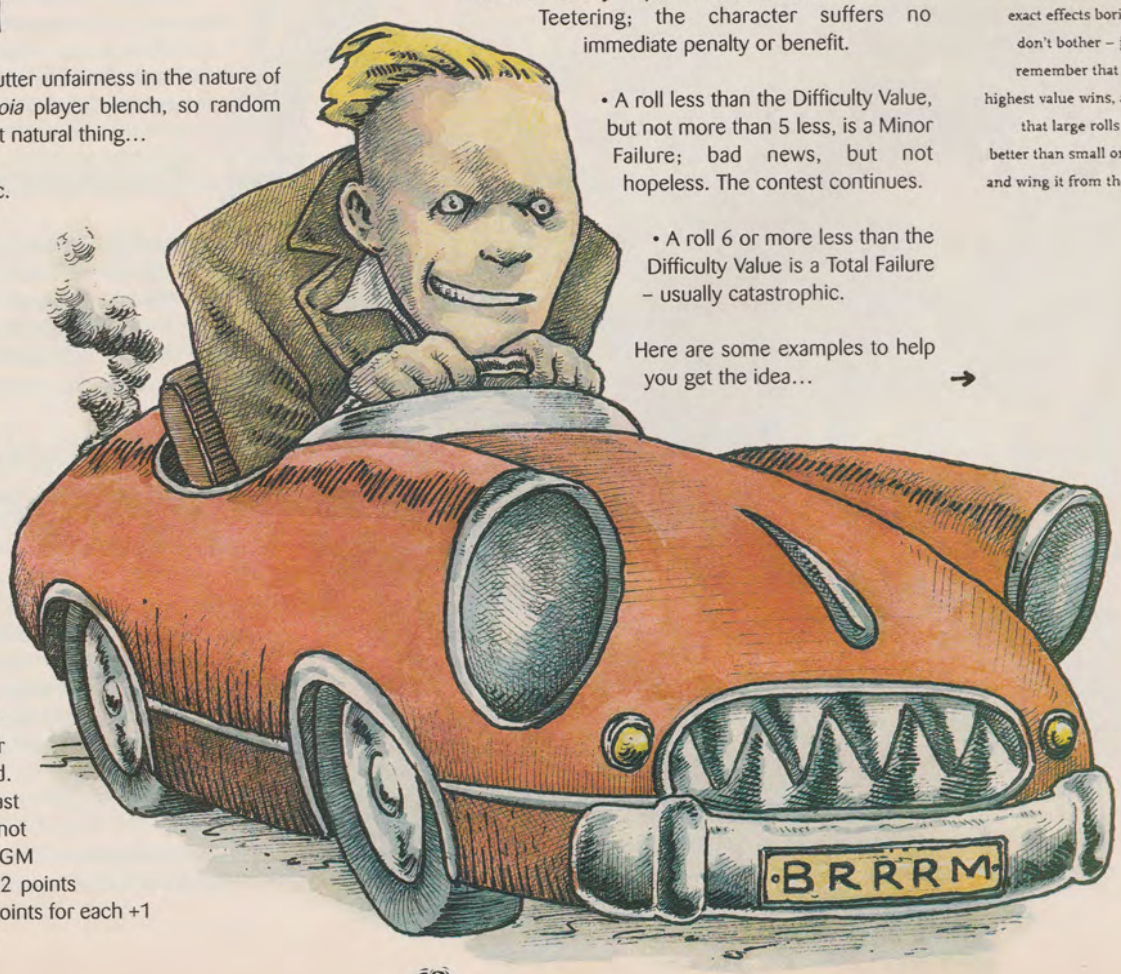
- A roll which beats the Difficulty Value by no more than 5 is a Minor Success, allowing the character +1D6 on any one subsequent roll which is logically related to the first action.

- A roll exactly equal to the Difficulty Value is Teetering; the character suffers no immediate penalty or benefit.

- A roll less than the Difficulty Value, but not more than 5 less, is a Minor Failure; bad news, but not hopeless. The contest continues.

- A roll 6 or more less than the Difficulty Value is a Total Failure – usually catastrophic.

Here are some examples to help you get the idea... →



Players and GMs may find calculating the exact difference between a skill roll and the difficulty or opposing skill annoying and time-consuming; in a fast-moving game especially, it may over-complicate matters, delaying vital jokes. Remember this is a roleplaying game, and the GM has the right to disregard, bend, or modify rules if it improves the game. In most RPGs, the GM should also be 'fair', but in this one, unfairness is normal. So if you find the need to calculate exact effects boring, don't bother – just remember that the highest value wins, and that large rolls are better than small ones, and wing it from there.

If boys meet with a random skool dinner, the GM can roll 1D6 for its 'Horror Level', and then roll that number of D6s for its Difficulty of Eating. If its Horror Level is high, but the boys get lucky on their Digestion rolls, it was clearly one of those pink creations that actually taste almost edible. This can be a good opportunity to discuss the subject with any master whose Digestion is poor.

Example 1: major minor, losing his temper, attacks gorbinthorpe. Unfortunately, major minor is a weed (Tuff 1), and gorbinthorpe isn't (Tuff 4).

But major minor rolls a 6 on his 1D6, while gorbinthorpe evidently has the sun in his eyes, and rolls 5 on his 4D6! This gives major minor a brief advantage; if he had any sense, he'd run away, adding 1D6 to his 4D6 from Running 4, thus easily evading gorbinthorpe's pursuit (Running 2) or lump of mud (Throwing 1).

Unfortunately, crazed by fluke success, major minor presses his attack. The next roll sees his luck hold; he and gorbinthorpe both roll 8 (on 2D6 vs 4D6), and are locked in futile combat.

However, he is now completely overconfident, and doesn't think of fleeing; his third roll is 1 on 1D6, against gorbinthorpe's 15 on 4D6. We draw a veil over what ensues.

Example 2: 'smelly' smith HAV NOT DONE HIS PREP. He is easily surprised (Alertness 1) by mr charteris the latin master (Stealth 6), and has to explain the crib notes on his knee.

Using Lying 5 against charteris' Paranoia 2, he claims that he forgot to wash them off while revising from them in the bath. charteris (Sanity 1) not only believes this, but treats it as a joke.

Example 3: jeremy crippin (Digestion 5) is hungry tonight. He decides to climb down the drainpipe and raid the larder, claiming that rope-climbing in gym is good training for this.

The GM smiles and assigns the climb a Difficulty Value of 8, against which crippin has Sport 4. However, the GM also decides that the skool has long tended to paint over rust, and spotting this is Difficulty Value 7.

crippin rolls, but sadly he is Alertness 1 and rolls a 1. The pipe looks fine! He make his Sport roll, and get 13. The rust gives way! crippin land on the gardener's prize dahlias! There is no way he can fail to make a noise, which the GM rules is Difficulty Value 6 to hear, and the dahlias are just outside the hedmaster's window...

Substitution

This is when a player makes a plausible case to the GM for using a 'wrong' Characteristic in some circumstance.

This is permitted, but usually constitutes cheating in the game world, forcing the character to make some kind of roll against another's Paranoia or Alertness.

A common use of substitution is to use Lying instead of Branes to look good in klass.

Example: cracklethwaite is Sport 2. borman, the hed of skool, have threatened him with TERRIBLE THINGS if he doesn't do well in the house foopball match. He decides to use Substitution, working over his opponents with his Tuff 4.

This work OK, but the ref is mr arbuthnot (Paranoia 5), who may use his Alertness 4 to spot cracklethwaite's fouls. cracklethwaite has a choice; either pit his Sport 2 against mr arbuthnot's Alertness, making his fouls look acceptable, or risk his Lying 3 against that Paranoia.

Experience

Raw power is not the point of this game, but boys do start as tinies and new bugs and end up big and tuff. Or at least, parents like to think so.

So GMs may reward great success, audacity, brilliant improvisation, ect, with 1 to 3 points, usable as in Character Building.

Space Battles, Parallel Universes, Super-Powers, Time Travel, ect

All these are entirely possible via the DAY-DREME SYSTEM (pat. pending). Any time a boy wishes, he may claim any completely weird Characteristics or Advantages he likes, then commence play in a scenario in a fictional setting of his choice.

However, he may be caught day-dreaming. Roll the Paranoia of the nearest master against a Difficulty Value calculated as follows:

Base: 15
For every two levels of Characteristic added: -1
For every Advantage taken: -2

Example: cracklethwaite, bored senseless by lessons, dremes he is GRUNGE GEOFFREYS, air ace, with Pilot 6 and the Advantage of a jet fighter. However, sturvecrake, the eagle-eyed geography master, rolls 20 on his Paranoia 5, against a Difficulty Value of (15-3-2=) 10. Just as geoffreys is barrel-rolling through a whole formation of enemies, sturvecrake makes his Throw roll (against a Difficulty Value of 3 for a static target at short range), and bounces a lump of chalk off cracklethwaite's skull.

GMs Note: There is some danger that players will use the Day-Dreme System to hi-jack the game and take off on private scenarios, leaving other players bored. The solution to this is to link Day-Dremes closely to game-world reality. Even if the boy is safe from discovery by masters, he must be somewhere when he is dreming, and will usually be doing something that reflects the dreme. (cracklethwaite was making quiet "neeee-oooowww-takkatakkatakka" noises.)

Scenarios

Many *Skool Rools* scenarios arise from the daily grind of skool life, or from the Day-Dreme System. However, GMs may set up the odd set-piece incident or extended plot-line.

Welcome to Skool: The PCs are all new bugs (built on fewer points?) and must survive their traumatic first few skooldays. They must learn an intricate and pointless set of conventions, identify genuinely friendly NPCs, kreeps, and thugs among the staff and other boys, and establish some kind of personal reputation.

Look to the Future: An example of using the Day-Dreme System for practical purposes. Faced with an essay competition with the title "My Future Career", can any boy dreme colourfully enough to defeat boring little major minor's uncanny sense of his own destiny, and come up with an essay to delight the heart of the new english master (Sanity 1)?

Fear and Loathing and Gurls: This is an example of a longer scenario that can involve a variety of characters. One morning, in assembly, the hedmaster announces that he has arranged a DANSE with st winifred's gurls skool, and reads out a list of boys who are "fit to represent our skool on this occasion". (Boys who have had cause to visit his study lately may recall a register of pupils pinned up on the door, with darts stuck in it.) The list he reads consists of the PCs. The danse is a week away.

Senior PCs will be given responsibility for monitoring the behaviour of lesser ticks, and ensuring that any especially grubby individuals are presentable. Needless to say, in the tradition of British justice, all PCs will be held jointly responsible for the behaviour of all the group.

In the week that follows, a mystery emerges. Some well-known boy hav DISAPPEARED. (If you use Willans and Searle's st custards, this could be molesworth himself; alternately, it could be the hed of skool, the skool bully, or whatever.) The PCs should be encouraged to investigate.

The truth is that the missing NPC is locked in the san with chicken pox. This is a secret because, if it reaches the parents, everyone will get a week off skool, which the hedmaster would hate.

Furthermore, if it should happen to be mentioned to any of the gurls at the danse, word will reach their hedmistress, watching from the sidelines – and the formidable dr esmerelda mcmungo would lead her 'poor vulnerable wee pixies' away from this plague pit, scorching the hedmaster with a glare as she went.

Investigations will involve encounters with the formidable matron, mrs schicklegross (Alertness 4, Order 5, Paranoia 4, Sanity 2, Stealth 3, definite German accent, toothbrush moustache). Worse still, any other members of staff who are encountered in the vicinity of the san will be nervous and edgy (+1 Paranoia), because the hedmaster has threatened their jobs if this gets out.

In any case, the danse must be endured for at least a few minutes. There is no way of avoiding this; the GM should cheat shamelessly to foil any attempt to get it cancelled or escape attendance. Senior boys will be required to undertake at least one waltz each with the hed gurl, lucinda sheepton (Alertness 1, Digestion 5, Sport 6, Tuff 6); a dance with her is a contest of Tuff ratings, losers coming back with shins black and blue.

Encounters are also inevitable with daphne shadwell, the rose of st winifred's (Alertness 4, Digestion 4, Lying 5, Throw 7, Tuff 4); daphne has the temper and reflexes of a polecat, and always keeps several trifles on hand, ready to throw. This is probably a better use for the party food than eating it, although it's better than most skool dinners (difficulty for Digestion rolls is 8).

Mostly, boys do not fight with masters. However, it is possible for boys to get into fights with adults. For example, a boy who has read more adventure stories than is good for his brane might decide that some unfortunate tramp is actually a spy, and try to capture him. It is up to the GM to assign the adult a Tuff rating and assess the consequences. Most adults will flee or collapse in confusion, but will emerge, flustered, to confront the nearest master. This, of course, is where things get nasty.

Strangeness and Charm

BY paul rose

OR 'HOW TO MAKE YOUR CHARACTERS COME ALIVE'

Comic books are a great source of inspiration for new characters – almost any Grant Morrison comic book, particularly DC's *The Invisibles* and *Doom Patrol*, are worth a look. Garth Ennis' *Preacher* is another fine DC book populated with freaks and fools. In fact, DC seem to have the monopoly on great characters; it's worth reading Alan Moore's *Watchmen* and Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* too.

It's time to face facts: you don't really want to live in the real world, do you? Oh, I'm sorry, did I reveal your big secret? Have I let the proverbial sabretooth tiger out of the sack? I don't wish to appear presumptuous, but if reality was populated with psychotic orcs and night-clubbing vampires and bionic assassins with monofilament whips concealed in their jockstraps, then you probably wouldn't spend so much of your time playing RPGs.

At least, I assume you spend a fair slice of your life either pretending to be someone else, or controlling a world filled with pretend someone elses, because otherwise you wouldn't have bothered picking **arcane** off the shelf. Don't worry; you're not alone.

I'm sure it's something that can be attributed to every person who's ever seen a film, read a book, or watched *Strike it Lucky*. Given a choice, we all wish our real lives were a bit more fantastic.

Who wants to sit exams when they can be lopping the heads off dragons with a six-foot broadsword? Who would pay the gas bill when they could don a pair of skin-tight spandex leggings to fight crime alongside similarly attired heavily-muscled gentlemen? Ahem. That's a topic for another magazine, perhaps.

The Flat People

So why is it that the characters encountered in RPGs are so often mere two-dimensional cyphers? If I had 65 pence for every time I met a chaotic-good 5th-level fighter with 46 hit points, a horse called Hawkwind and more magic rings than Jimmy Saville, I'd be rich enough to lose £1.25 down the back of the sofa and not even notice.

Horses and hit points and stupid magic rings do not make a character. Background story, motivation and personality do, however. So often players and referees will mistake stats, skills and equipment for the whole character.

And come on – how many 'real' people do you know who were given an alignment at birth and then spent their whole lives sticking to it? I abhor *AD&D*'s alignments. People are unpredictable; they're not machines. It's a lazy way of creating a persona.

If you're involved in a campaign, players and referees both have a duty to create interesting characters. After all, why bother escaping from the real world in the first place if your alter-ego talks and acts just like you, but with some really cool weapons?

Like any good story, a decent roleplaying session will be propelled forwards by the characters – not by banal quests or sudden coincidences.

Creating and roleplaying unusual and interesting individuals isn't difficult. The more you get involved in devising a character's story, the more fun you'll have with them. Naturally, whether a player or a referee, you should always make sure that whatever you come up with will fit into the game world. It's quite easy to overstep the mark and create someone totally at odds with the tone of the campaign.

By the same token, a good referee should be able to make almost any concept fit into any campaign. Robots in *AD&D*? No problem – just make them a mixture of clockwork and magic.

A Good Idea Helps

Always begin with a basic concept – a few lines which will provide a nice starting point. This is the hardest part, but everything else should flow from this.

Even a tiresome description such as "a cybernetically enhanced assassin with an appreciation of fine culture and links to several major crime families" can be twisted into something unique. You should consider how your assassin came to acquire his implants. Was he involved in some sort of revenge attack which left him crippled? Was he the guinea pig in some bizarre experiment?

"What does he look like? Who are his friends? Is he ruthless or compassionate? Does he like the taste of human flesh?"

And just where did he develop his tastes in music and art? Is he the son of a Mafioso Don, sent out to develop contacts and gain experience before he can take his place at the head of the family? What does he look like? Who are his friends? Is he ruthless or compassionate? Does he like the taste of human flesh? Can he pat his head and rub his tummy at the same time? These are the kind of questions you should ask →

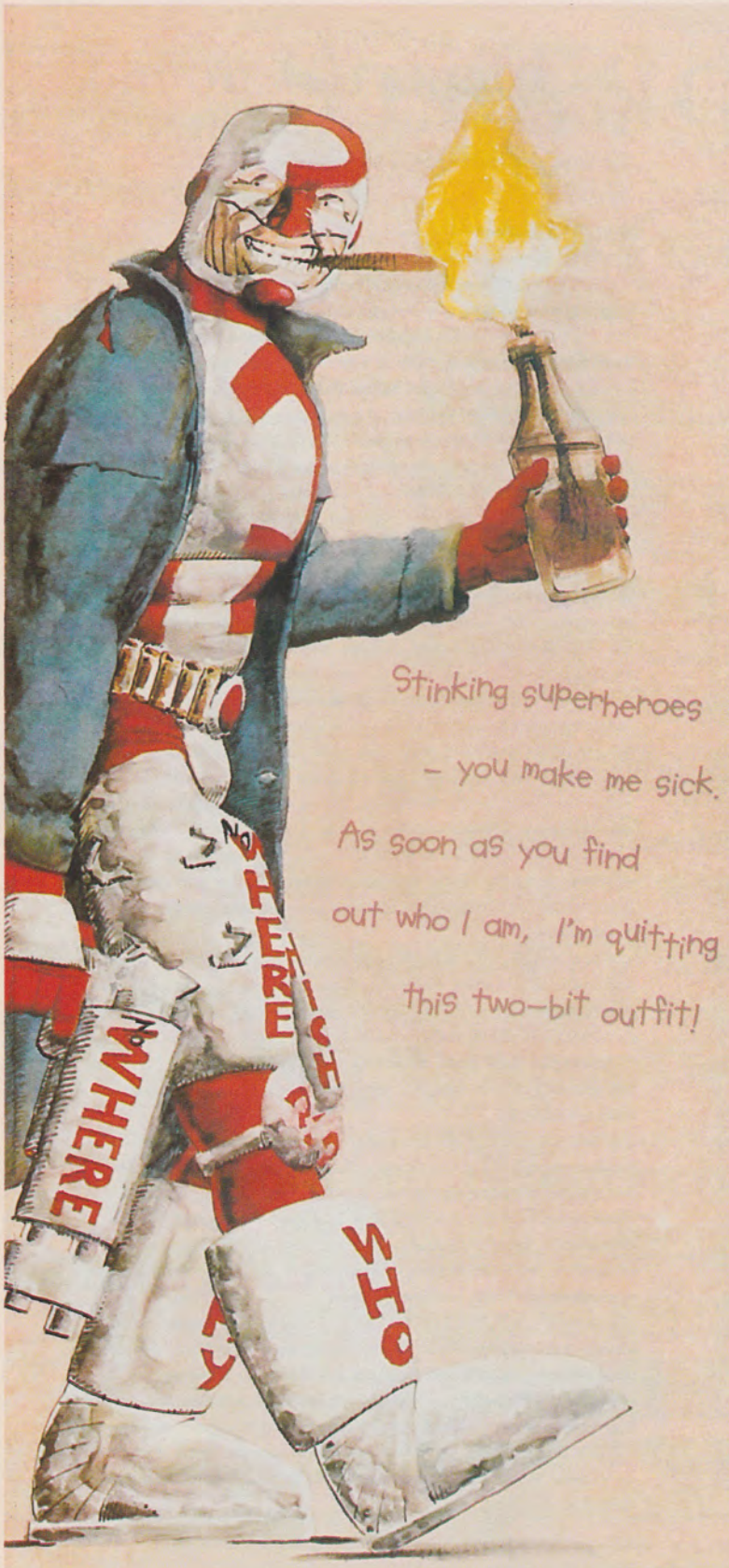
Raithmore McHound

Even high fantasy can benefit from a bit of imagination...

Genre: Fantasy
Name: Raithmore McHound
Concept: The son of a time-traveller from the far future. He uses knowledge from another age to fight dragons and orcs.
Background: On a stormy night more than 20 years ago, a huge fireball fell from the sky and its impact was heard for miles around. When the wise man Tellion visited the forest where it had crashed, he found the remains of a strange silver capsule, and a strangely-garbed pregnant woman lying unconscious amidst the debris. He returned with the woman to his abode and, though she never regained consciousness, a week later she gave birth to a healthy son. Tellion had gathered weird items from the wreckage, the purpose of which he could only imagine.

He named the boy Raithmore, and raised him as his own. As Raithmore grew, it was clear that he possessed a knowledge far beyond his years, and was able to construct strange machines out of the most basic components. The old man and the boy travelled for many years, often stopping at communities struck by famine or war, where they would use Raithmore's abilities and machines to put things right. Word soon spread, and it wasn't long before people sought Tellion and Raithmore. One such person was the tyrannical Lord Artus Silvermane, who laid a trap for the pair, brutally killing Tellion and imprisoning Raithmore. For months, Silvermane insisted that the young Raithmore build machines of war for him. Despite constant beatings, the boy always refused, and eventually managed to escape from the castle. Raithmore swore revenge and spent years in the wilderness, honing his physical prowess and learning the ways of the warrior.

Personality: Though quite introverted and bitter at times, Raithmore is unselfish, and thinks nothing of helping someone less fortunate than himself. His ultimate goal is to rally an army against Lord Silvermane's forces. He rarely laughs, and the only links he has to his origins are a small, scorched painting of his mother (in reality this picture is a photograph), and a few lumps of strange metal taken from the capsule.
Appearance: His years of training to be a warrior have served Raithmore well. He is extremely strong and agile, and makes the most of his physique by wearing a pair of tight leather leggings, a cloak made from the skin of a bear, and knee-high boots. He has developed a number of neat gadgets to help him in his quest for retribution, including crossbow grappling hooks, basic hand grenades made from oil flasks, and hang gliders.
Friends, contacts and enemies: Though he may appear a solitary type, Raithmore likes company, and has several pets, including a wolf and an eagle. He could call on several of his old teachers if need be, and could probably ask a favour from any of the many villages he has helped. His arch-enemy is Lord Silvermane.
Typical quote: "Will I ever know who you were, mother?" or "I swear by the Creator that I will avenge you, Tellion." Yeah, he likes a good cliché.



Johnny Nowhere

Making characters interesting really can be fun. And it'll add so much interest to your game.

GENRE: Superhero

NAME: Johnny Nowhere

CONCEPT: A reluctant superhero with a death wish. He has above-average strength, an armoured costume, and a couple of really big hand-guns.

BACKGROUND: Johnny Nowhere isn't Johnny Nowhere. When popular US superhero Captain Question was killed during an epic battle in the Himalayas, his body was retrieved by benevolent monks who healed his wounds and retrieved what they thought to be his eternal soul from the Afterlife. When he awoke, it became clear that this wasn't the soul of the sensitive adventurer Captain Question they had rescued, but that of a foul-mouthed, superhero-hating psychopath suffering from severe amnesia. Almost immediately, the monastery was attacked by enemies of Question, and the reborn crazy had no option but to defend himself, adopting the temporary monicker of Johnny Nowhere. In the months that followed, Nowhere was constantly pursued by enemies of his body's former inhabitant, hampering his search for who he really was, and why he hated being a superhero. He retained the costume and weaponry for protection only, and eventually sought help from Question's team-mates in the Justice Brigade. They agreed to assist him, but only with the promise that he would join the team for a probationary period.

PERSONALITY: Nowhere is unpredictable and often irrational. He is constantly frustrated by his condition, and occasionally suffers flashbacks from both his own and Captain Question's life. He is outspoken, selfish, rude and bad-mannered. Though Nowhere often wishes he was dead, he doesn't have the courage to take his own life; instead, he volunteers for all the most dangerous assignments, in the hope that each might be his last. He's curious about who he is, but part of him is afraid he won't like the truth. He does have a sensitive side to him, though he'd never admit it; he has a soft spot for life's victims, particularly the elderly. He hates superheroes with a passion, often going out of the way to upset his team-mates by behaving in an unheroic way. If only he knew why...

APPEARANCE: Nowhere wears Captain Question's basic costume, which is an armoured all-over body suit. His face mask is blank, bar a single red question mark. On top of this he wears a dirty raincoat, in which he stores ammunition for his weapons and sundry other pieces of equipment.

FRIENDS, CONTACTS AND ENEMIES: Obviously, his team-mates in the Justice Brigade are the closest Nowhere comes to having friends. The monks who initially rescued him could be called upon in an emergency. His main enemies are Captain Question's enemies – particularly the sinister Doctor Scab, who finds Nowhere's plight incredibly amusing.

TYPICAL QUOTE: "Stinking superheroes – you make me sick. As soon as you find out who I am, I'm quitting this two-bit outfit!"

← when developing a living, breathing, convincing character.

Don't let the creation process overwhelm you. If you're struggling to find a suitable hook to hang your characters on, just steal. It's pretty unlikely James Cameron is going to sue some funny little roleplayer for copyright theft just because he used a time-travelling cyborg killing-machine in one of his scenarios.

Steal Wisely

The only trouble there is that your fellow players are likely to snort in derision at your staggering lack of originality. So simply pinch bits from a variety of sources and mix them up.

Take that human-looking cyborg from *Terminator*, add a pinch of Sherlock Holmes's detective powers, give him the outward manner of Han Solo; but add the inner angst of Morrissey, drop in a sliver of Samurai honour, and top it off with Ringo Starr's former alcholism. Mmm – perfecto! Now you've just got to come up with a decent story to explain where this honourable, 7ft cyborg rogue learnt his detective skills, why unrequited teenage lust has left such deep psychological scars, and how he went from being the cheeky Beatle who played the drums, to the cheeky ex-Beatle who couldn't play the drums or stand up.

Whatever you decide, creating the characters should be as much fun as roleplaying them. You won't have any fun as Bostik the Warrior if you don't make him a compelling and unique addition to your group. There's nothing wrong in setting aside an entire evening's session for the development of the PCs. But then again, never create a character that's different and unusual just for the sake of it. Think once, think twice, think will I really enjoy playing as Sister Saline the Schizophrenic Nun?

"Never create an odd character just for the sake of it. Will you really enjoy playing Sister Saline the Schizophrenic Nun?"

When creating NPCs, referees needn't take so long, but every major character in a scenario should possess a number of key traits; a few background notes help, and you'll often find it useful to scribble down a couple of typical phrases the character might say. How about this for our alcoholic cyborg detective: "Don't get cocky, kid – I'm sober enough to know from the stain on your shirt that you've been to Madam Ra-Ra's House of Love again!" Then again, perhaps we should forget about him.

In a campaign populated with unconventional and colourful beings, it shouldn't be long before the stories start pouring from the characters themselves. Childhood rivals mentioned briefly in your background may return for revenge. That minor health problem you threw in might turn out to be something far more sinister. Friends, colleagues and relations may be kidnapped, killed, turned against you or find themselves falling hopelessly in love with another player. The same applies to NPCs.

A referee will often become as attached to well-designed characters as the players, but how many times can an arch-nemesis return from the dead? Too many, so keep those reappearances believable. Or don't. It's up to you.

Get a Life

Character creation is only the start of the whole process. Player characters should be allowed to evolve, and I don't just mean by gaining experience points, or hero points, or by whatever other unrealistic method is usually employed to force development.

If you found a big sack of gold at the bottom of your garden, would you suddenly become stronger, more intelligent, tougher to kill? Only if you used it to enroll in a crash course of combined martial arts and atomic physics, perhaps. Development should be an informal, organic process, and referees should increase players' stats only when they think it's appropriate.

It could be that several months have elapsed in game time, and the players are assumed to have been working out intensively. Or maybe they've swallowed a potion, been bitten by a radioactive porcupine, or unexpectedly mutated into a higher life form.

Conventional sources can also be rewarding. The films of Quentin Tarantino may not be filled with typical RPG types, but they're worth plundering for ideas. Samuel L Jackson's bible-bashing hitman from *Pulp Fiction* is a good example. You could take a look at almost any book by Iain Banks, read some Shakespeare – especially *Midsummer Night's Dream* – lift from legends and mythology (Robin Hood, King Arthur) and even watch the news for inspiration! Keep your eyes open and unique characters will soon be leaping out at you from every direction.

However, increasing stats and upgrading a character's inventory should be of equal importance to the evolution of a character's personality and personal life. If you're still using the same PCs in two years' time and they're identical to when you began, then something has gone terribly wrong somewhere.

A stationary campaign won't sustain itself; if you're all playing the exact same characters week in week out, things are going to break down. In a long-term campaign, characters should get married, lose limbs, get new jobs, have kids, lose more limbs, win the lottery, get knighted, have lost limbs replaced with tentacles, gain new powers, buy a pub, get revenge on the guy who cut their limbs off, get divorced and be thrown in jail – everything that could happen in a regular life, but 10 times the fun because it isn't really happening to you.

Glowing Old

At the end of the day, even roleplaying characters have a finite existence. It may be that they've been developed so far that to weigh them down with any more emotional baggage would buckle their legs. Even troublesome real-life enemies such as university or a new job can signal the end of your group.

When this day comes, a fitting swan song should be prepared. Whether that's going down in a blaze of glory by crashing your crippled starfighter into the bridge of an enemy spacecruiser, or by simply walking off into the inevitable sunset, it's always a shame to suddenly end a character's existence.

Even after the death blow has been struck, if you've decided to create new characters within the same gameworld, it needn't be that they simply winked out of existence. Legends could build up around former PCs. Maybe one of them has been spotted working in a chip shop, or happily getting fat and bald on a Carribean island. Grateful citizens could erect a statue in their honour. A former enemy could attempt to discredit them by committing heinous acts in their name.

Roleplaying isn't a board game. It's the only game that tells a story and, unlike any other game in existence, it plays better if you ignore the rules. But if you don't bother creating characters which live and breathe, then why bother roleplaying at all? You'd probably have more fun playing Ker-Plunk.

TRICK C

Every referee wants to make his game a sort of total virtual reality. He wants players to forget about themselves, and become their characters; forget about the real world, and get caught up in the game.
If you are the best referee in the world, then your brilliant portrayal of NPCs, your tension-filled scenario and your marvellous story-telling powers will captivate the players all by themselves.
But for the rest of us mortals, Andrew Rilstone knows a few good ways to cheat...

Illustration: Keith Jackson

R CHEAT

If you want your players to *really* get engrossed in the game, the first thing you *must* persuade them to do is identify with their characters. That isn't always easy. But here's a place to start...

1: Panic!

You've reached the dramatic climax of the game; the fate of the world hangs in the balance. The characters are under a huge amount of pressure, but the real-life ballplayers are lounging around in armchairs with cans of Coke at their elbows. Is it any wonder that they don't feel particularly caught up in the action?

Solution? Stick a large alarm clock or stopwatch on the gaming table and say: "Okay, guys. There's just fifteen minutes to go. When the bell rings, the nuclear reactor in Doctor Dismal's base will go 'bang', terribly loudly. Not that I'm trying to hurry you, or anything..."

This is monstrously unrealistic, but it works. It creates an artificial sense of urgency. Players start to panic. It forces the players to think quickly. It puts a real value on leadership skills. And, when those last few seconds are ticking away, it makes the whole thing unbearably exciting.

2: 'On Air!'

Of course, a game isn't all non-stop breakneck action. The most rewarding sessions involve diplomacy, interrogation, arguments, or politics. That is, they involve characters *talking* to each other. There is no time at which these scenes are more involving and →

→ more fun than when players are persuaded to talk 'in character'. But how can you encourage players to use their characters' voices instead of their own?

Some referees make a rule that 'Anything *you* say, your character says'. This sounds good on paper, but it is almost impossible to enforce it in practise. Do you really want your Samurai Warlord to say: "What are these strange 'twiglets' that the barbarian wants me to pass?"

"If one of the characters is a Cavalier, give him a hat with a feather in it – even if it's only from a toy shop. If he's an errant monk, give him a cross to wear"

One (slightly drastic) solution is to announce to the players that you are going to tape-record part of the gaming session. On the down side, this may make the players self-conscious. They'll probably think for a moment before they speak; the pace of the game will slow down. But the quality of what is said will improve by a hundred per cent.

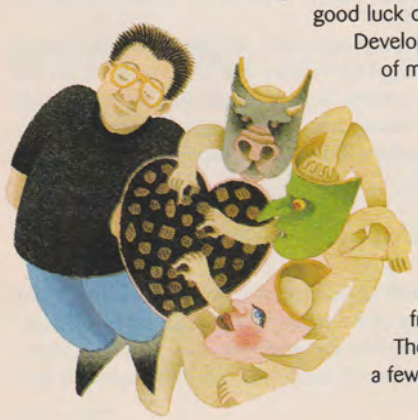
The players will start to treat the game as if it really were an 'improvised play'. Their characters will become better drawn and more realistic and at the end of the day you will have a very interesting and unusual souvenir of the most important moments of your campaign.

3: The Prop Cupboard

Another way of encouraging a player to identify with his character is to give him a few items of costume to wear, or some props to hold.

But I'm not suggesting that you should tell people to come dressed as their characters. Keep things simple. If one of the characters is a Cavalier, give him a hat with a feather in it – even if it's only a silly plastic thing from a toy shop. If his partner in arms is an errant monk, then give him a cross to wear around his neck.

The purpose of these props is not to look good, but to help your players use body language. The Cavalier can take his hat off and make flamboyant gesticulations with it; and the monk can touch his cross for good luck or hold it between himself and the monster. Developing mannerisms like this is one more way of making characters seem real.



4: Bribery!

If they succeed in their mission, then the characters will be rewarded: with the lost treasure of Atlantis, or a supply of rare, alien mineral or, at the very least, a medal from the commander of the Rebel Alliance. The players, on the other hand, get nothing but a few measly experience points.

Sometimes, a bit of subtle bribery can make the players feel that they have got just that little bit more riding on the adventure. You might try giving them a fun-sized Mars Bar each time their character gets a certain number of experience points (or each time they make you laugh; or each time they succeed at an outlandish stunt – depending on what type of game you are running). This will also have the knock-on effect of making them all think that the referee is a really nice guy.

The idea that players will feel even more 'involved' in the scenario if they receive a sharp rap on the knuckles each time their character is wounded, although it is an example of the same principle at work, is probably taking things just a little bit too far.

Creating an Atmosphere

Okay – so you've used some unsubtle gimmicks to encourage your players to identify strongly with their characters. The next trick is to get them caught up in the atmosphere of the game. The aim here is to distract their attention away from the real world and towards the imaginary setting of the game.

1: Soft lights and sweet music

Music is incredibly useful as an aid to gaming, because of the way it affects people's moods. People are going to feel more energetic and warlike while listening to 'Ride of the Valkyries' than they do when someone puts Max Bygraves on. Similarly, if a room is dimly lit, people are more likely to be relaxed and 'mellow' than if you turn all the strip-lighting on. As referee, make sure that minor details of this sort are carefully set up to work in your favour.

Some people make a very big deal out of music and lighting. I've found that – although a red light bulb *might* create the sense that you are on an alien planet, and a flickering candle does sometimes produce a rather 'spooky' atmosphere for a horror game – this sort of thing does not, by itself, do much to set the tone for the game.

What is certain, however, is that a bad choice can totally wipe the game out. It simply isn't all that easy to soak up the atmosphere of the World of Darkness if 'Yellow Submarine' is playing in the background.

And don't, whatever you do, leave yourself open to this sort of thing:

REFEREE: 'Okay – did you make your Avoid Eldritch Abomination roll?'

PLAYER: 'How should I know? It's too dark to read the @?&*ing dice!'

2: Do It for Real!

I've never understood why people keep 'live action roleplaying' and 'tabletop roleplaying' in such separate boxes. If your players are getting well into their characters, then sooner or later one of them is bound to stand up and start miming in order to show the referee what his character is trying to do. At the very least, they'll shake their fist at an NPC or punch the table to show their anger. If players are going to do this sort of thing anyway, then why not make use of it?

If you want people to get caught up in the game world, then it makes sense to make the real world as much like the game as possible. I don't mean that you should build a life-size model of Camelot in your back garden – although, if you do, I want to play in your game. But there are lots of small-scale things you can do.

If your gaming group normally has munchies before or after the scenario, then why not try making this part of the game? Tell the players that 'lunch' is the bill of fare at the Drunken Monoped tavern. Instead of chatting about how awful last week's *Babylon 5* was, let the characters boast about their victories and their adventures. This works really well at the beginning of a campaign, since it allows the PCs to 'get to know each other over a drink' before the scenario proper starts.

Where is the rule that says you must always sit around the same table? Move the furniture so it suits the setting of your scenario. If you are playing *Star Wars*, and your PCs are crewing a freighter, then set your room out to look like the bridge. One chair in the middle of the room for the pilot. Two chairs behind him for the gunners. One person sitting in a swivel chair by your computer to represent the ship's navigator.

If you've never done it, you won't believe how much fun it can be to sit in the Captain's chair and yell 'How long till we make the jump to hyperspeed?!' across the room. (Naturally, the *Star Wars* theme music will be blaring out of your CD player.)

The players will duck and fall across the room when the ship is hit by enemy fire… they'll crawl around under the table while repairing the warp engine. (If your mother drops by, she'll think you have gone completely mad, but that is a small price to play for the Total Roleplaying Experience.)

3: Messing With Their Heads

For some players, none of the above will be enough. They crave reality. They want to experience real fear, hunger, tiredness. The ultimate game would be part Virtual Reality and part hallucination. And, just occasionally, a referee can mess with his players' heads so they come close to this Ultimate Roleplaying Experience.

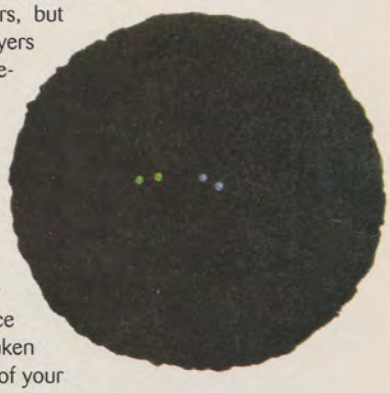
I've seen grown men weep in roleplaying games and players going into fits of depression that lasted for days after the game. So? Did anyone ever promise that roleplaying would be fun?

I'm joking, of course. But from time to time, a referee can introduce a trick or a twist into his game that will really freak the players. And if you are going to try this sort of thing, you do need to be careful.

I don't think that there is much chance that you will induce a psychological trauma in your players. No, the real danger is that when these ideas fail, they fail badly and the referee is left looking like a complete plonker…

But if you are brave enough to try, here are a few tricks that I have seen work…

1: Two PCs in a science fiction game crashed their shuttle on an alien planet. While the other characters were trying to work out a way of getting them back, the two unfortunate players were made to sit by themselves in a dark room, and only allowed to communicate with the other players by passing notes via the referee. It only lasted a couple of hours, but believe me, by the end of it, those two players really did feel as if they had been through a life-threatening ordeal.



2: A group of people arrived at a seminar room during a convention, under the impression that they were going to listen to a talk about roleplaying. Suddenly, three people in costume – the referee and some 'assistants' – burst into the room. 'You are now prisoners of the Transgalactic Federal Police Force', they announced 'And you are being taken back to Alpha Prime to answer for the crimes of your species.' One thing is for sure – those players didn't have to roleplay being surprised.

"You won't believe how much fun it is to sit in the Captain's chair and yell 'How long till we make the jump to hyperspeed?'"

3: A group of players were playing a bog-standard *Call of Cthulhu* mystery. Except – the referee somehow neglected to mention to them that they were playing *Call of Cthulhu*. In fact, he inadvertently got them to roll up characters for the long out-of-print *Gangster!* RPG, which, like *CoC*, is set in the 1920s.

So when the players discovered trails of blood and dead bodies, they naturally assumed that they were dealing with a murder or a terrorist plot. For once, the insane cultists and their Dark Gods came as a genuine, and very unsettling, surprise.

And finally...

Some of these ideas may seem more than a little weird – perhaps rather childish, even.

Well, watch a five-year-old kid playing 'let's pretend'. His Dad's screwdriver is an Atomic Powered Ray Gun, and the back garden has become a Rhinoceros-infested forest. And so far as he's concerned, it's all completely real.

I reckon he knows something we don't.

Many thanks to all the crazy referees whose ideas I have used in my own games and in this article – Andrew Rilstone.

Alien Nations

Hobbits

Tolkien vehemently denied writing allegory, but his hobbits are basically pastoral English people and The Shire is our own 'green and pleasant land'. Tolkien once wrote somewhere: "I am in fact a hobbit".

The problem with hobbits is that they don't work well outside Middle Earth. Within Middle Earth, they're portrayed as 'jovial but light-fingered' and they live happily among humans.

No. Bree was unique, and besides, would you tolerate a merry burglar? Racial discrimination would be rife. Hobbit pogroms might exist. Hobbits might form an underclass, live in shanty towns and so on.

And in a society where halflings are discriminated against, you're more likely to get Sawbones the Deranged Psycho and his Procrustean bed ('I'm short and proud of it; you can be short too, heh heh') than Sam Gamgee. For a far more realistic view of RPG halflings, see Mary Gentle's book *Grunts*.

Klingons

The original *Star Trek* was heavy on metaphor, and it seems pretty clear than Klingons were metaphors for the Russians (and, arguably, that the Romulans were metaphors for the Chinese). The episode that best illustrates this is called 'A Private Little War' (broadcast Feb 2, 1968). In it, the Klingons arm one tribe on a once-peaceful planet, and Kirk decides to arm the others...

If you don't believe the allegory, explain Praxis (Chernobyl?) in *Star Trek VI* or Worf's post-Glasnost presence on the Enterprise. Sure, any allegory can be taken too far, but what *Star Trek* does demonstrate is that you can pick and mix from politics and cultures and apply them in new situations.

Hardened Trekkers might like to ponder the relationships of Bajorans to Jews, Maquis to Palestinians, Ferrengi to Arabs, Cardassians to Nazis... If you want to debate all this, try rec.arts.startrek.misc on the usenet.

Best and worst fictional races: arcane's own arbitrary selection

Best

1. Gloranthan Trolls from *RuneQuest*
2. David Brinn's neo-chimpanzees (*The Uplift Saga*)
3. The androids in Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
4. Phagors in Brian Aldiss's *Helliconia* trilogy
5. Moorcock's Melniboneans (intelligent, sophisticated bad guys!)

Worst

1. Kender in the *Dragonlance* books
2. The 11-fingered aliens in L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*
3. Vulcans (one-dimensional cack)
4. Gloranthan Ducks (too much like Daffy)
5. Humans in any story by Terry Brooks

The humans of Pyrrus in Harry Harrison's *Deathworld* are a good example. Pyrrus is a two-G planet where all the flora and fauna is unremittingly hostile. As a result of this, Pyrrans all look like Arnold Schwarzenegger and have finely honed killing instincts by the age of about eight. (Those that don't, die – or never leave the safe areas.)

On top of this, they're humourless and blinkered, and they never get animated unless they're talking about phosphorous bombs.

By contrast, Tolkien's hobbits are peaceable and fat, eating six meals a day because... well, because they can. Hobbits have an easy life and their society reflects it – it's cosy and conservative. Biologically, they might gravitate towards that kind of society, but it's only the regular border patrols by the rangers that enable it to flourish.

Pratchett's dwarves are less dour than the Pyrrans, but they do have a tendency to take things literally. "This is a result of their subterranean life," says Pratchett. "In an environment where things are always ready to explode or collapse it is vitally important that information be passed on clearly and honestly. The human language... is a veritable minefi- a complete morass- a fog of incomprehensi- very difficult for dwarves." (*The Discworld Companion.*)

Moorcock's Melniboneans are sadistic – but though Moorcock often compares them to cats, the trait doesn't seem to be genetic. There are suggestions that they weren't always a sadistic people. More likely, the ample free time that their slave-based society brought them has led them to suffer from ennui, and their ten-thousand-year-old empire has given them a sense of superiority. Guided by hedonism and not morality, torture has become as much an art to them as poetry.

As an aside, it's surprising that more games' elves (always a highly intelligent, long-lived, capricious race) aren't more like Moorcock's Melniboneans than the Tolkienesque ideal...

Cut And Paste

The quick-and-dirty way to get racial psychology and sociology sorted is, of course, to use a fully formed real-world example as a template. *Star Trek*, where aliens always were differentiated visually by different kinds of masks and make-up, has been doing this for a long time (see 'Alien Nations', above). You get Russians, Chinese, Nazis – all sorts of real-world races thrown into the melting pot.

Whether or not you like allegory (Tolkien professed to hate it, but used it), an alien culture that's a bit like a real-world one is better than none at all.

And history, as historians are fond of reminding us, repeats itself. Past cultures are ripe for plundering, whatever genre you play in. In SF and fantasy, different races often make up distinct political units.

In Raymond Feist's fantasy books, his standard-issue medieval European world, Midkemia, has some kind of astral

gate linking it to another world that's a take-off of medieval Japan.

If you're playing SF, there's no reason why you can't use a Roman-style space empire that's being routed by a futuristic Attila the Hun. Allegory only really grates when too many parallels are drawn. Sure, have Star Vikings, but don't give them (not that real vikings wore them anyway) horned space helmets.

Characters like the scheming and rather too oriental Ming the Merciless are simply too overblown and kitsch.

Original Thoughts

The cut-and-paste technique works less well with races that are less human. Here, you'll really need to design from the bottom up. It does take more work, but quite a few authors have made a pretty good stab at it.

David Brinn's *Uplift Saga* has already been mentioned. It is remarkable not so much for the aliens – which tend to hover in the background – but for the genetically altered and fully sentient dolphins and chimpanzees. The dolphins, and the dolphin spaceship, Streaker, are a lesson in imagination to anyone who equates intelligent races with bipedalism.

Dolphins, in Brinn's novels, are excellent spacers, especially pilots, because they're used to navigating in three dimensions. As regards their character, the dolphins are energetic and poetic, yet make great efforts to be technological and disciplined; the chimps are bolshy and irreverent. Both are sometimes regressive.

For a alien reptilian culture, have a look at Harry Harrison's Yilané in *West of Eden* (and others). They're intelligent dinosaurs with millions of years of development behind them. They've made great strides in genetic science, and manipulate other creatures to form weapons, transport and medical aids.

Seen from the outside, the murgu (as their human enemies call them) are vicious monsters. From the inside, Yilané society is highly stratified, sophisticated and expansionist. Interesting. Harrison even gives them a 'proper' language (courtesy of philologist Prof TA Shippey) – one of the rare ones that feels right, and not merely a collection of English-That-Never-Was and glottal stops.

Radically different thought processes – like those of an intelligent insects' hive society – are difficult to roleplay. Have a look at the intelligent beetles in Alan Dean Foster's *Spellsinger* books, or at the ants in TH White's *The Book of Merlin*.

One hurdle that is pretty much insurmountable is the race that's more intelligent than humans. It's not just hard to imagine, it's probably harder than we *can* imagine. Here the best solution is probably to follow Lovecraft's angle; keep them out of the spotlight, and allow that there are some things that man was not meant to wot of.

And Next Month

Life begins to get really lively as we introduce religion and magic to the melting pot.

When Is A Troll Not 'A Troll'?

When *Trollpak* was published in 1984 it had no competition: it was the only game supplement that fully, and entertainingly, explored all aspects of an alien race. (*Chivalry and Sorcery*'s *Saurians* supplement came closest, perhaps.) When it was republished in 1988, it lost its campaign booklet, but it still had no competition. And to my mind, it hasn't today – even though it's now out of print.

It does for trolls what *Cults of Prax* did for religion, and the detail is without parallel. I can think of nothing I would want to know that isn't given some coverage – troll psychology, troll physiology (even down to the exact dentition), troll mythology, troll paleontology... the list goes on.

Greg Stafford and Sandy Petersen, creators of *Trollpak*, deserve a pat on the back for turning a dark-dwelling bogeyman into a living, breathing, and playable species. *Trollpak* is still the benchmark by which such things must be judged. Here, its creators talk about how the idea evolved...

Greg Stafford: "In *RuneQuest* trolls quickly became a favourite monster – their every measurement was taken and turned into a viable stat. They were surely a favourite of mine. I was determined to show my players that these creatures were something besides monsters to kill. With a rallying cry of 'Trolls have kin too!' I began to show how they worked.

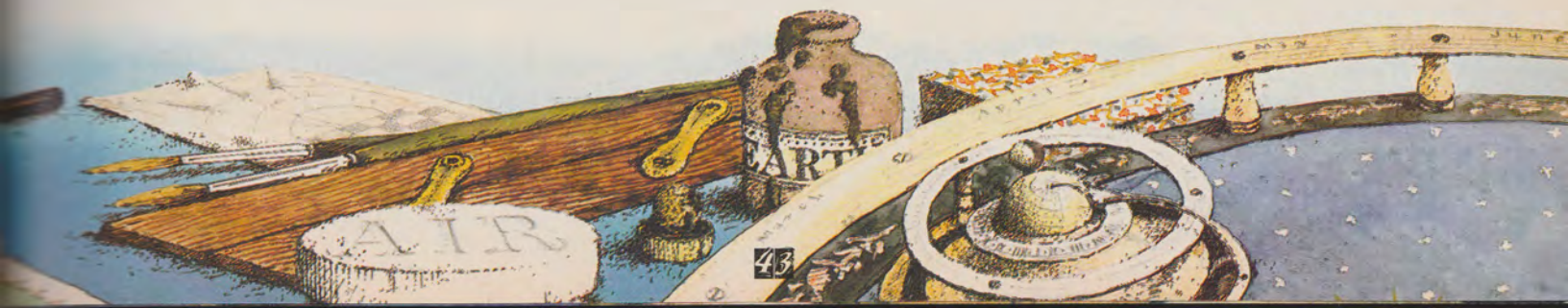
"The gradual revelation of details surprised me, too. For instance, I didn't know at first about the details of their sonar senses, nor about their amazing digestive system. I did know they ate, hated light, and worshipped ancient Kyger Litor. The details grew out of a study of them which follows their own logic. The discovery was skilfully guided by Sandy's imagination and knowledge of zoology, and fired by our mutual enthusiasm."

Sandy Petersen: "I had preconceptions about trolls when I began the project. As it grew, my ideas and theories grew with it. The trolls matured and developed into fully rounded individuals, and their race became a fascinating complex of creatures.

"My favourite part in the completed work is the troll evolutionary family tree. Greg provided a time-line and ideas for most of the creatures included. I made the basis for the tree and did the initial drawings for the skulls. The family tree would look at home in any paleontology text book. Another of my favourites is the troll menu..."

In Chaosium's original *Trollpak* there's a troll sport called Trollball. Armed and armoured trolls compete in a bloody variant of American or Australian Rules football. Games Workshop's boardgame *Blood Bowl* came out some years later...

For those who like anthropomorphism, there's a 'furry page' on the net (for people who like dressing up as animals and so forth) at http://www.confurence.com/old.htm complete with links to pages about foxes, badgers and all the rest. Rad, mad, or just plain sad? You decide.



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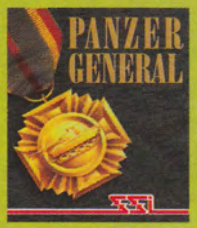

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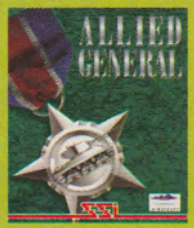

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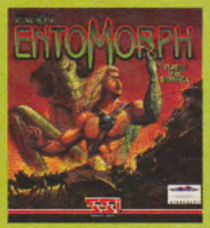

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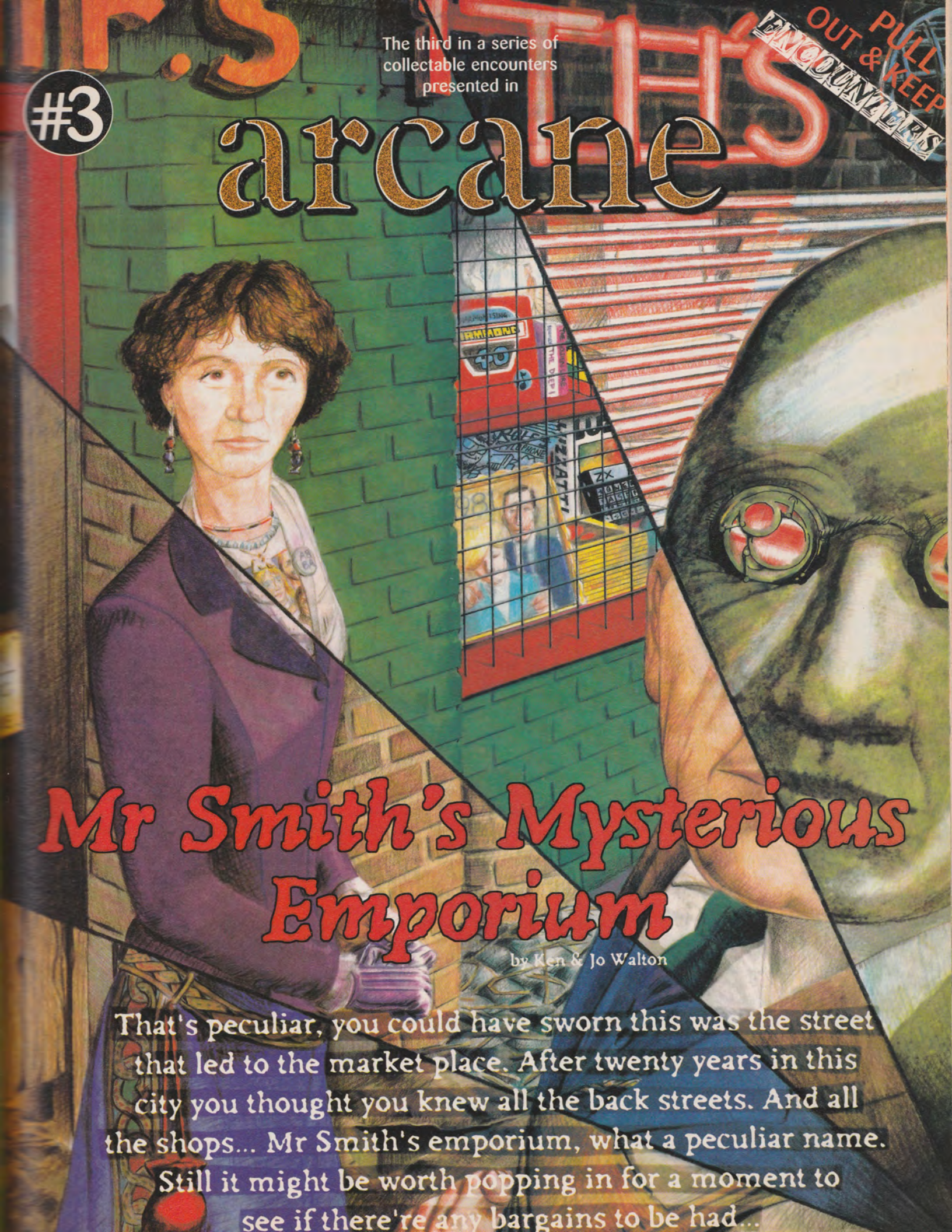


Mr Smith's Mysterious Emporium

by Ken & Jo Walton

That's peculiar, you could have sworn this was the street that led to the market place. After twenty years in this city you thought you knew all the back streets. And all the shops... Mr Smith's emporium, what a peculiar name. Still it might be worth popping in for a moment to see if there're any bargains to be had...

arcane *proudly presents another excellent 12-page scenario that you can use in any setting, any era...*

Mr. Smith's Mysterous Emporium

Illustrations ©Simon Gurr & arcane

Mr. Smith's Emporium is a small, unassuming shop, squeezed in between other, much larger establishments. The window is grimy and displays old, battered, dusty objects that are surely of no interest to anyone. Can this really be the place?

The door creaks as you open it, and a spring rattles an old, tarnished bell. The inside of the shop doesn't seem much more enticing than the outside. There is a counter; there are shelves piled up with dusty goods; and you can see two doors set in each wall. One is marked 'Staff Only'.

An old man comes forward from behind the counter to greet you, rubbing his hands together and smiling. "What can I do for you this time?" he asks.

Funny. You've never been here before. But you've heard if you ask him for the right thing, he can make all your dreams come true. "What was it you wanted?" he asks again...

Mr. Smith's Emporium may look like a run-down, seedy junk shop – but in reality it is a powerful interworld portal, run by the mysterious Mr.Smith for who knows what reason?

The shop is described for four different genres; fantasy/historical, Victorian/Edwardian, modern day and cyberpunk/future. Whichever genre your campaign is set in, one of the shops will seem normal – but if you step through one of the interworld portals you will find yourself in one of the other versions of the shop.

The interworld portals are only visible if you are "the right person", or if you've been invited to pass through one by a member of staff. (Whether the portals are magical or the latest experimental technology will depend on the style and setting of your campaign.)

The shop is usually found in a little back street of a big city, crammed between two larger buildings, as described above, but it doesn't have to be. Wherever you place it, though, it's easy to miss, and players will find that they readily forget exactly which street it's in. You could wander the back streets for hours trying to find it one day, and another day stumble across it by accident when you're looking for something else entirely. Mr. Smith's Emporium is that sort of place.

The System

You're a smart person, right? We don't need to patronise you with detailed rules on how to translate these people and events into your own system, do we? But just in case you're uncertain, here's a couple of tips. Whenever we do a character description (though there aren't too many in this scenario), we'll say something like 'Doctor Bloggs has a fine, incisive mind and this is complemented by a strong, athletic body. As a child, however, he suffered from a rare lung disorder that means he has difficulty in sustaining effort. He is also prone to making rather impulsive decisions.' In game terms this would mean that Doctor Bloggs has above-average strength, intelligence and dexterity and below-average constitution and wisdom. Exactly how much above and below average is up to you and the strength of your party of adventurers. This is also the case in systems that use levels. Give the encounter's characters the sort of levels that will make them a challenge for your players. You'll find similar descriptions of all important physical objects, such as 'the door is paper-thin' or 'this glass is bullet-proof'. Now stop reading this wibble and get stuck in.

Fantasy/historical setting

The Shop Front

A faded and peeling painted sign proclaims "Master Smithes Emporium". The window is made of tiny bulls-eye panes, grimy with the dirt of years.

Peering through the glass, you can see a clutter of dusty objects set up in a display which has not been changed for years. There *might* be something you want in there, but it's hard to tell. Is that a sword? Is that a pile of old books? Rope? Candles? Jewellery? It's difficult to see, because the window is so dirty and the interior poorly lit.

A bell jangles as you push open the wooden door, which is warped and stiff with age.

The Shop

The shop itself is a long, narrow space, its walls lined with dusty wooden shelves containing all manner of discarded items. There are racks full of weapons of dubious quality, piles of old books, random pieces of rusty armour, the stuffed heads of strange beasts, crystal balls, scrolls, something that might be a printing press, an anvil, strange clockwork mechanisms, a pair of jade ear-rings, pots and pans, ropes and grappling hooks.

From the low wooden beams hang bunches of dried herbs, a stuffed crocodile, a useless brass lantern, fishing nets and other less identifiable stuff. It's hard to tell exactly what's here, because the room is only dimly lit by a single oil lamp – there could be *anything* at the back of those shelves.

Behind the Counter

At the far end of the room, a long wooden counter divides the room in two. This is cluttered with bottles, boxes and stuff, leaving only a small area usable.

Behind this is the staff area. There is a huge ledger open on a battered wooden desk, where details of sales are recorded with a quill pen. Much of this space is filled with piled up junk, some of which looks as if it's been there for years.

To the right of this area, at the back, are more shelves in long rows, filled with bottles of potions, the skulls of various beasts, unicorn horns and other magical or pseudo-magical paraphernalia. This is where the more valuable or easily stealable things are kept. It's usually in semi-darkness, except when a member of staff goes in there with an oil lamp, looking for something – then the observant customer might see a glint of gold or the twinkle of a gem at the back of a shelf.

At the very back of this space is a door that leads out into the yard.

Magdalen

Magdalen wears her long dark hair caught in a knot at the back of her neck. She favours long, plain, high-necked gowns. She is polite but shy, talking quietly and keeping her eyes lowered when talking to young male customers.

She is apologetic about the condition of the shop and genuinely helpful about trying to find things. She will call on Smith if there is any difficulty.

She may confide in female adventurers that she was once apprenticed to an apothecary, but when the apothecary died, she came to work at Smith's, where she intends to stay until her boyfriend has saved enough for them to marry.

Victorian/Edwardian setting

The Shop Front

The sign is a rectangular board above the window, proclaiming in peeling letters "The Emporium. Proprietor: Mr. Smith". A garish metal plaque on the door advertises "Patent Californian Borax – The Marvellous Antiseptic – Safe, Agreeable, Pure".

The window is divided into small square panes, and is so badly lit that it's impossible to see very much at all within. Vaguely seen on display are piles of books, tins of boot polish, umbrellas, a stuffed squirrel with crossed legs sitting in a rocking chair, a chipped bust of Napoleon, a rack of pipes, two violins and a small portrait of Queen Victoria.

The Shop

The shop is dimly lit by hissing gaslights, and smells of damp and mothballs. It is crammed with all manner of strange items; piles of old books, the stuffed heads of big game beasts, tiger-skin rugs, racks of fur coats. There is an elephant's-foot umbrella stand filled with umbrellas, sword-canes and old shotguns.

The wooden shelves which line the walls are filled with packets of plaster of Paris, ships in bottles, brass astrolabes, collections of birds' eggs, a pile of 'Strand' magazines with a copy of 'The Necronomicon' hidden among them, and a vase full of ostrich feathers.

The carpet in the centre of the varnished wooden floor is an ancient and threadbare Persian rug, which should probably be in a museum, as should the "genuine Egyptian sarcophagus, IVth Dynasty" which leans against the shelves by the counter.

Behind the Counter

The counter is of deep brown mahogany. A huge, brass-trimmed hand-cranked cash register sits at one side of the counter, which is meticulously tidy, unlike the rest of the shop.

Behind the counter is an old school desk with a lift-up lid, scored with many years' worth of graffiti, on which rests a large ledger, into which Miss Davenport enters a record of sales in her neat copperplate handwriting.

The shelves behind the desk are in darkness, unless Miss Davenport deigns to light the gaslight in the corner. On these shelves are a selection of chemical glassware, bottles of chemicals such as Arsenic and Hydrochloric Acid, medical dissection kits, sinister voodoo masks, shrunken heads and rare and valuable books like the first edition of 'Weasel Grooming

for Amateurs'. Many of these things are put aside for regular customers, and have neat little labels on saying things like "Reserved for Prof. Challenger, 1 guinea to pay".

Since the shop's regular customers are likely to include several trans-dimensional travellers, the items kept at the rear of the shop are likely to include things which are out of place in this era.

Miss M Davenport

Miss Davenport wears prim Victorian clothes in dark colours, with lace embroidery at collar and cuffs. She has a neat bun of dark hair. The general impression she gives is somewhat prissy and governessy.

She seems to regard it as beneath her to actually serve customers and will call Smith if there are any queries, although she knows where things are in the shop and can replace them in the exact spot from which they came. She spends much of her time polishing the counter and tidying it.

She will be disdainful of any low-class shoppers. She will immediately reveal, at any sign of interest from upper-class characters, that she has been reduced in circumstances.

The modern-day shop

The Shop Front

The shop front is painted with peeling green paint, and the grubby plate-glass window is protected by a wire mesh screen which makes seeing into the window rather difficult. The window is supposedly lit by a fluorescent tube, but it's rarely switched on and when it is on, it flickers intermittently. Plastic lettering attached to the brick wall of the building proclaims "MR S ITH'S E PORI M". The window seems to be mostly filled with piles of old knitting magazines and dog-eared romantic novels, but there is also an obsolete home computer, a faded photograph of Queen Elizabeth II, and a bucket of second-hand golf balls. The door has a frosted glass window, on the inside of which is a cardboard sign which invariably reads "Closed".

The Shop

The shop seems to specialise in old electrical goods, old records, old paperback books, and chipped china ornaments. The shelves are filled with figurines of little girls on swings and toby jugs, while cardboard boxes full of LPs litter the floor, containing records such as the James Last Orchestra, the Top Twenty Hits of 1972, and the Best of the Osmonds.

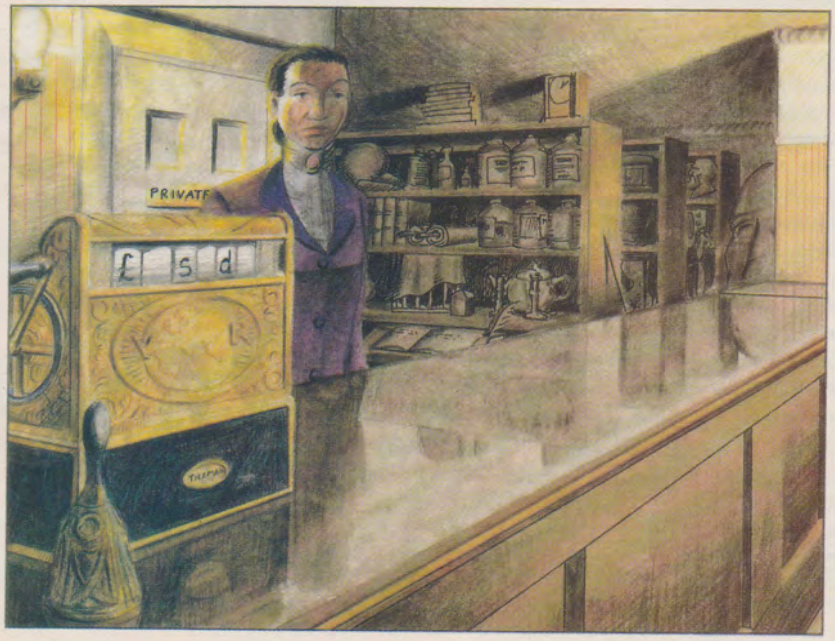
Customers are forced to step over old Hoovers, rusty lawnmowers and battered tea-urns, and wend their way between twin-tub washing machines and 1950s fridges. It seems that every flat surface has at least one pile of tattered paperbacks, often tied together with string and with a label on saying "Romance" or "Thrillers". There is a rack of second-hand shirts, dinner jackets and coats; there's a whole shelf of ladies' hats piled up on top of one another; and there's a basket of shoes and belts.

Behind the Counter

The counter is a glass display case, containing a selection of old toy cars, dusty Christmas tree ornaments and second-hand digital watches without batteries, none of which are priced. There is no till – sales are recorded in a spiral-bound notebook, and the money is kept in tattered polythene bank-bags in Magda's pocket.

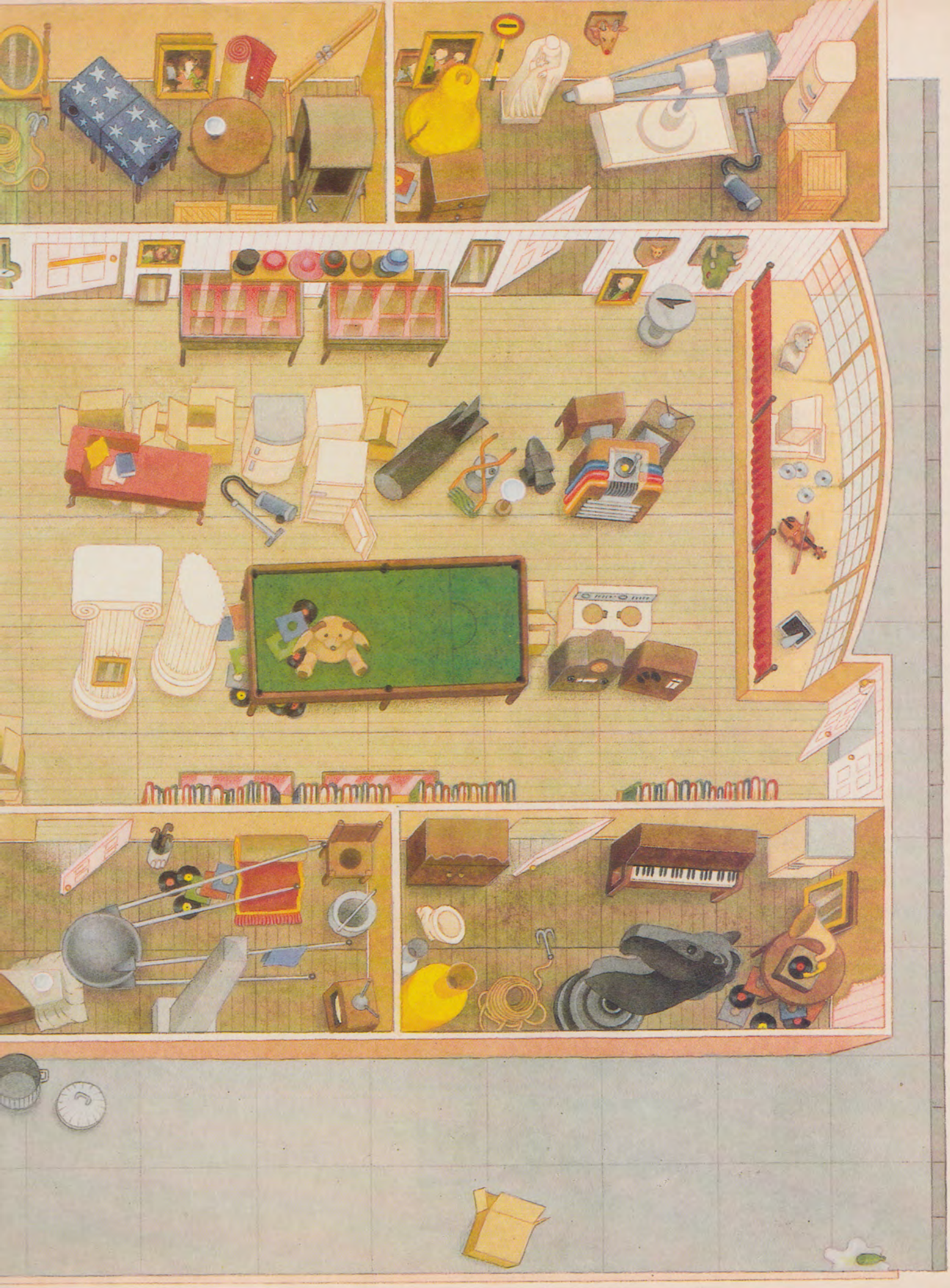
The shelves behind the counter are full of more junk: motors out of old washing-machines, broken electric fan-heaters, two six-inch-square marble dice, a pile of Victorian chamber pots, a statue of the Virgin Mary with the head missing, two buckled bicycle wheels and a leaky inflatable Smurf.

Magda spends a lot of her time huddled in front of the camping-gas fire, on top of which are seven dirty coffee mugs, one of which plays 'Silent Night' when picked up. The floor behind the counter is littered with old carrier bags, empty sandwich packets and flattened cardboard boxes.



Magda Davenport

Magda has permed dark hair and wears overalls and cowboy boots. She is friendly but uninterested, calling all customers "love". She spends most of her time sitting down reading Westerns and often ignores customers until they deliberately attract her attention. She will then be apologetic and explain that she was "miles away". She will call Smith if there are any problems, or if something needs to be priced. She may mention her little boy who needs to be picked up from school, or complain about high prices in other shops, but will not confide details of her private life.



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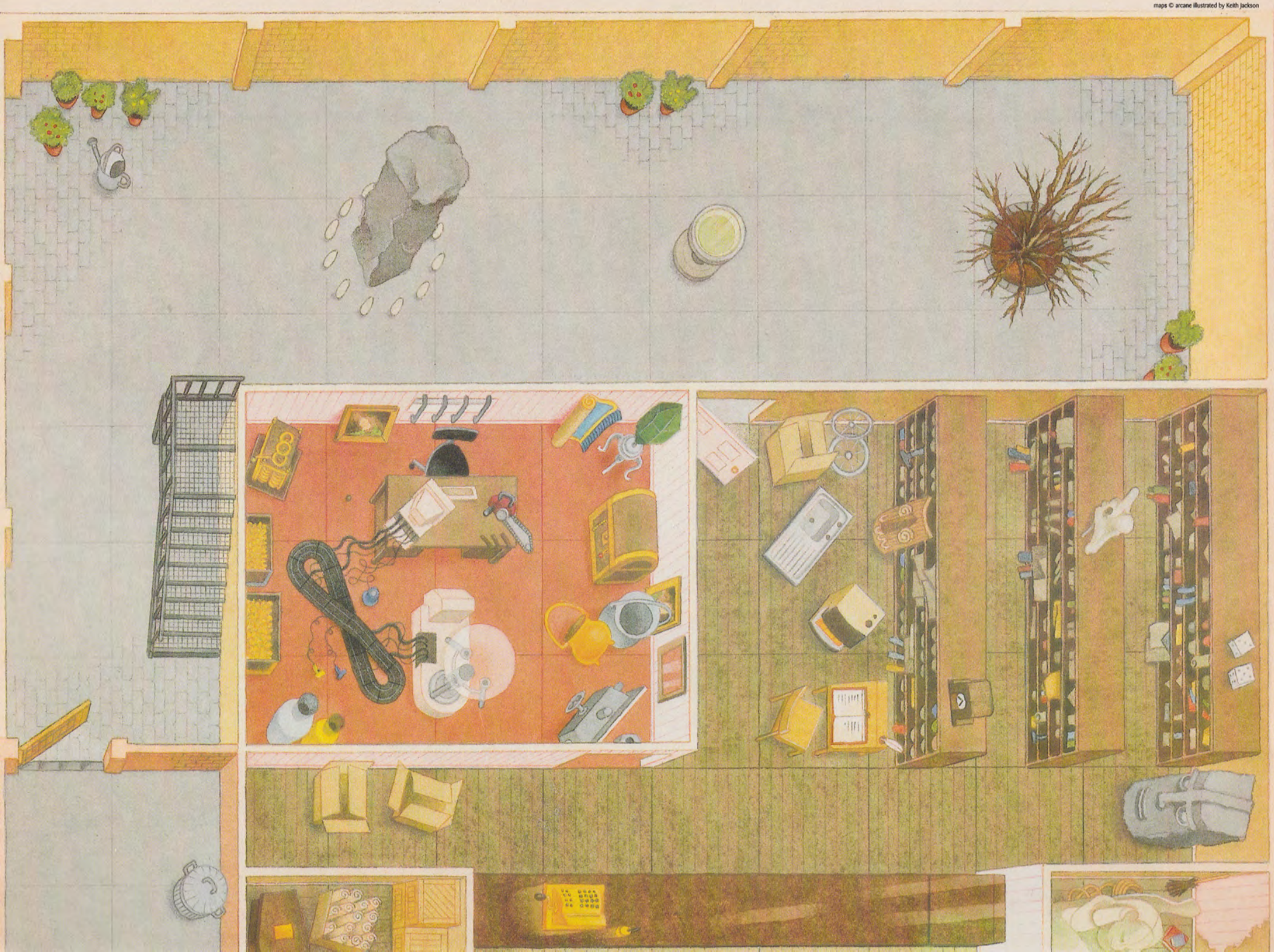
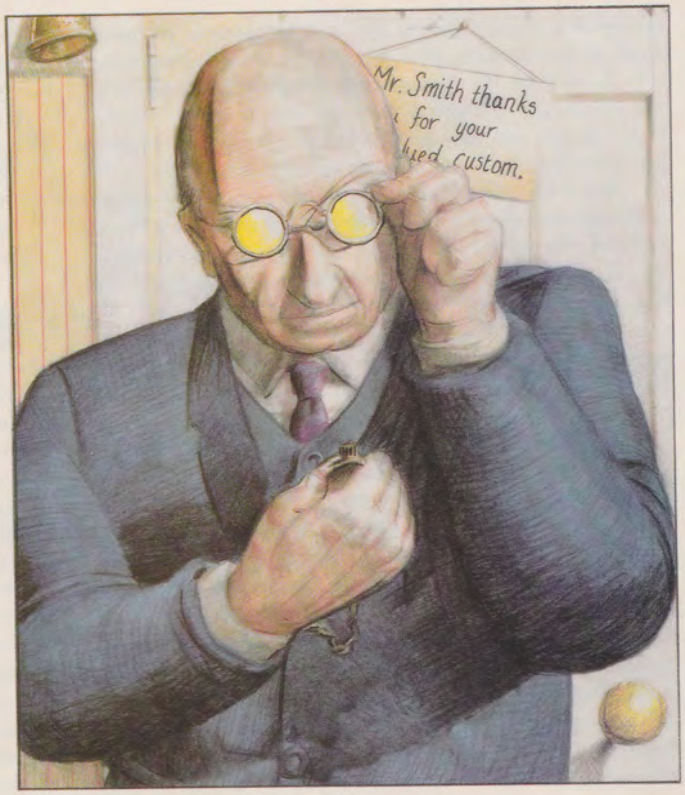


The Cybershop



The Shop Front

The shop has a faulty flickering red neon sign saying simply "Smith's". The window is grimed with pollution and has heavy security bars. It is just possible to see shapes through the grime – can that really be a valuable old 1980s home computer under those quaint CD games for the obsolete home Cray?

The Shop

At first sight the shop looks rather impressive, but it doesn't take long to realise that much of the stock is holographic illusion and not really there at all. The shop is rather dirty, and filled with useless clutter. There are shelves of cyber-equipment, most of it broken.

The best that can be found are the left eye of a cyber pair marked "long-sighted" and a rather good top-of-the-range cyber-arm with visible bullet holes. It is marked "Only one previous owner".

There are also racks of old out-of-fashion clothes, priced cheaply. There is a display marked "Technology" of out-of-date computers and computer equipment. There are stacks of books and, even more useless, disks and CDs in obsolete formats.

Close examination of the books shows a manual for CPM 2.2 sitting on the top of a pile of Mills and Boon romances, the middle volume of 'The Last Dangerous Visions' and a paperback edition of 'Hegelian Synthesis Examined in the Light of Kantian Imperatives – For Dummies' with a torn cover. There are also tottering piles of 'Magic: the Gathering' cards, held together with rotting rubber bands.

There are piles of uncompromising junk, including soap in the shape of an elephant, dusty joss-sticks, broken clockwork spiders, cracked mugs with the faces of forgotten filmstars, a unicycle and chipped glasses etched with dragons.

Behind the Counter

Mag Davo generally slouches against the grimy chrome of the counter. There is an up-to-the minute system for payment, almost the only modern thing in the shop. Valuable items are stored on shelves behind the counter. These include some of dubious legality, including weapons and software. A huge glittering lump of Fool's Gold can be seen.

This part of the shop is not lit at all, but Mag seems to have no trouble finding things on request. There are large piles of cardboard boxes, and one pile of cardboard boxes that have been flattened, as if for recycling.

Mag Davo

Mag has spiked green-and-silver hair. She wears wrap-around mirror shades and colour-changing clothing. She is also visibly armed with what she calls "shop-lifter stoppers".

She shows no interest in the shop, its contents or its customers, however. She is constantly plugged in to the world's data web, listening to music and up-to-the-minute news. She has infra-red vision, allowing her to find things in the darkness of the shop. However, people may find it hard to contact her on the net.

They may also wonder what such a plugged-in person is doing working in a junk shop. She will not answer any personal questions. At any time there may be one or more of her admirers hanging around the shop, trying to talk to her. They are street-wise looking young men. They leave if Smith appears, but show no sign of being intimidated by the party.

Common locations

These are rooms that all the times/places have in common.

The 'Store-rooms

Four doors lead from the main part of the shop. One of them is marked "Staff Only". The other three lead into small store-rooms crammed with even more junk. But at the back of each room, hidden away behind the shelves is another door. This door will only be noticed by someone who is destined to find it – or it may be pointed out by the shop assistant or by Mr Smith himself. Otherwise it will remain lost in the shadows (in a technological era, the light doesn't work).

If you step through one of these doors, you will find yourself in one of the other times/places, as chosen by the referee. You will come out in another small store-room, but one crowded with junk of a peculiar and unfamiliar nature. You have

passed through an interworld portal, and are now in another world or time (or both).

If you leave the store-room by the door in front of you, you will find yourself in a different, though strangely familiar, shop, crowded with items you have never seen before. And when you leave the shop – it's a whole new world out there.

The door marked "Staff Only" is usually locked. If the door is broken open, there is only a toilet/privy. But if specifically invited by Mr Smith to enter that door, you will find yourself somewhere totally different. Where this door leads is left to the referee's warped imagination.

Smith's Office

This should be very difficult for the PCs to get into without invitation. Its door is heavily protected with spells/security technology, and should be impossible to force or break down. In the unlikely event of the PCs getting in (this is only likely to be by invitation, or if Smith has gone missing – see below) they will find the place an awesome sight.

There is a desk and chair where Smith works, and the rest of the room is crowded with a mish-mash of valuable artefacts from every time and place imaginable. Magic cauldrons, video recorders, brass telescopes, wrist computers – you name it, it's there. On the desk is a 1990s PC computer wired into a 21st Century holographic display tank; there's a large brass and mahogany difference engine on the floor; and there's a strange glowing crystal on an elaborate silver stand.

What this strange collection of equipment does is up to referee ingenuity – perhaps it is a communication device with which Mr Smith communicates with his home plane, or maybe it's just the shop's accounting system. In the ceiling in front of the desk there is a small hatch, giving access to the attic – except that there is no visible means of reaching it.

The Alley

At the side of the shop is a small alley, containing dustbins, broken bottles and the occasional drunk. There is a heavy gate at the end, giving access to the yard.

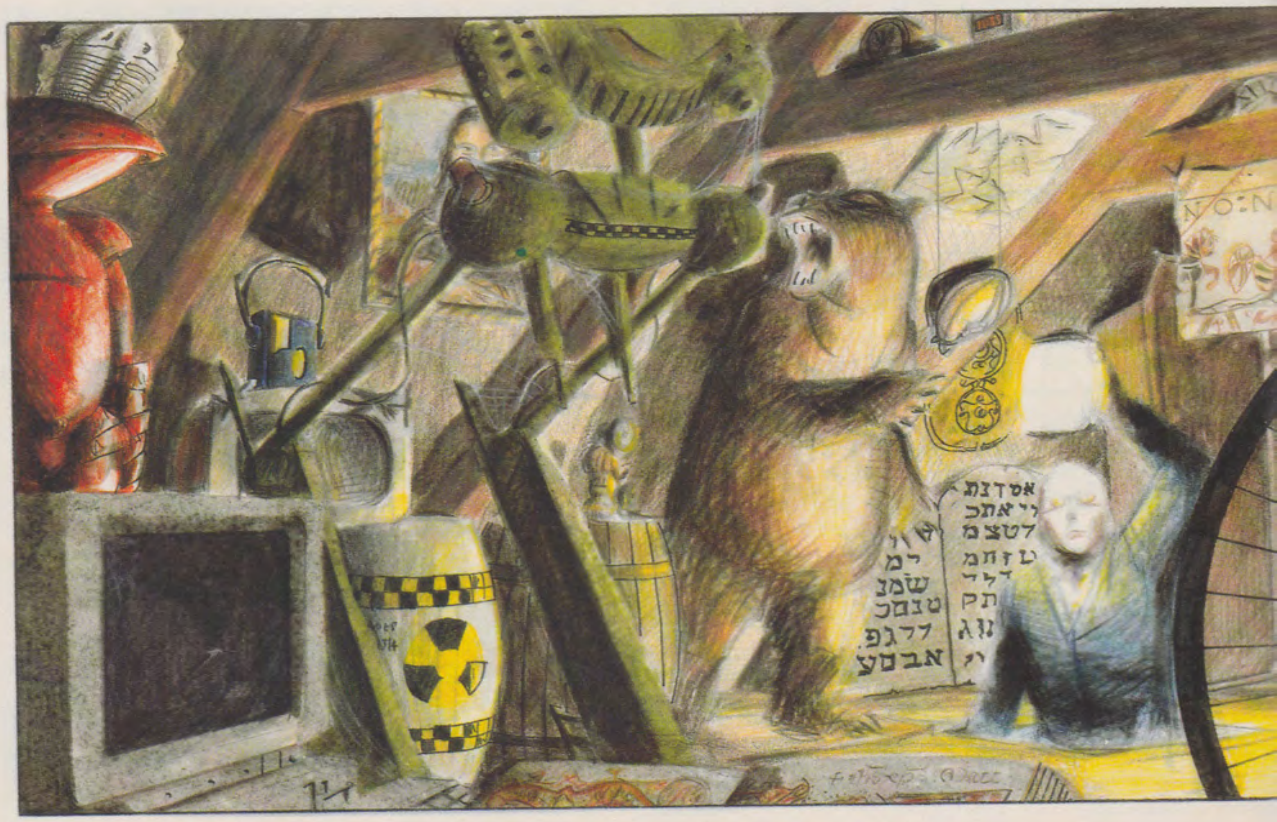
The Yard

The back yard of the shop extends along the side and the back of the shop. It is cobbled, and contains some pot plants, a bird bath, a gnarled rowan tree, and a mysterious standing stone. A fire escape, or a rickety stairway, leads to the attic.

The Attic

The attic is reached from the yard, via the fire escape, or through the hatch in the ceiling of Smith's office. It has a slanting roof with low beams and it is full of things. Many of them are packed in boxes, crates and barrels, which are stacked haphazardly against the walls.

There are also strange pieces of machinery, coffins (one marked "Transylvania, do not expose to sunlight"), a cast-iron pipe stove, a deactivated combat robot holding a laser protectively across its chest and a stuffed bear. Some of the barrels are labelled "Nitrogen atmosphere only" (and others, more worryingly, "Chlorine atmosphere only") and many have the triangular 'hazardous waste' mark stencilled on in shocking pink.



Mr Smith

Mr Smith is a grey-haired man of nondescript appearance. He wears round spectacles that catch the light and prevent his eyes from being seen clearly. He seems kindly and benign, but is somewhat mysterious. His clothes are unmemorable and suitable for a shopkeeper in his time and place. He is hard to get to know and his motives are unfathomable. He is soft-spoken and polite, but if anyone threatens him he will prove to have more in the way of high-tech or magical weaponry than they do.

There are a number of different ways for the referee to use Smith, depending on campaign flavour. He may be a hero or a villain, a patron or an enemy, or his motives may never be revealed. He could be an alien, a time-traveller, or a wizard. He may be content to run his shop without being bothered, or he might be the spymaster of a trans-global organisation.

Another flexible point is what Smith wants in return for allowing the PCs to use his shop. He may allow it to happen for nothing, or he may insist on a high price, either in money or in favours returned.

The Assistant

Mr. Smith's assistant is an attractive young woman. Although she appears to be the same young woman in every time/place, unlike Smith her personality appears to be very different in the different shops, and she gives similar but different names. She may be a part of Smith's conspiracy.

Alternatively, she may be completely ignorant of what is going on. In this case, he might have located avatars of the same person in the different realities, or merely people whose faces are uncannily similar. Although these same-but-different young women appear to have lives that go on outside the shop, they are never actually seen leaving...

Adventure Possibilities

This shop can be fitted into any campaign, allowing the referee to move the PCs to another game universe. This can either be a one-off, or as part of a continuous cross-genre campaign. Here are some suggestions for discovering and using the shop:

* Rumours are going round that a lot of people are disappearing. On investigation, it is discovered that the last time any of them was seen was near this shop. Who knows what happened to them – and is the so-called "Door to Another World" really that, or a fiendish disintegration machine?

* When exploring the shop the party find themselves in a fight in the attic. Barrels explode, pieces of machinery can be used as weapons with unexpected results, piles of crates collapse when climbed on, the stuffed bear starts dancing – and is that laser in the robot's hand just a toy...?

* The PCs arrive in the shop with their enemies in hot pursuit. As the door opens behind them, they duck into a cupboard – only to find that it is much more than a cupboard...

* The PCs are on the run, and Mr. Smith will help them escape their enemies in return for all their money. Will they trust him?

* After the PCs have been using the shop for a while, and got to know the owner well, he is kidnapped by strange forces, and the PCs must venture through the "Staff Only" door to rescue him.

* Mr. Smith is actually evil, and is sending the PCs to another world for mysterious purposes of his own.

* When the PCs return to their "own" world they discover it is subtly different in mysterious ways.

* The Cross-Space-and-Time Campaign – the players and their enemies are both using the neutral ground of Smith's to combat each other across the multiverse – and it is the only place where they can meet face to face without immediately reaching for their weapons.

Next month

Stormburg! The mysterious floating city that is concealed within the eye of the hurricane...

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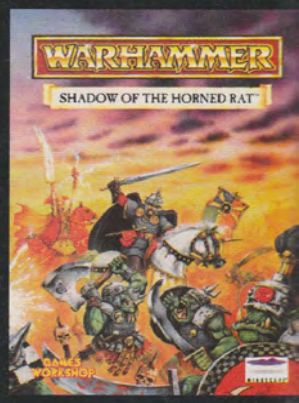

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The Month In Games

The new year finds us inundated with top releases

The new year's begun with such a flurry of releases demanding to be reviewed in the inimitable and in-depth **arcane** style that it's been a struggle to fit them all in. But we managed. We've said it before and no doubt we'll be saying it again: our policy is to review honestly, fairly and incisively all the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases. Never again need you risk wasting your hard-earned cash on any old rubbish.

To maintain such a high standard, our reviews are written by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games you do. We're not owned by a games company, and we can't be bought by bribery or by advertising revenue. If you want to read definitive reviews of games and expansions, welcome to **arcane**.

(And while you're here, a note about prices. A lot of stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by a number of different distributors, so the prices we've given must be viewed as guidelines only. Fluctuating overheads or something...)

Pick of the month

"One of the most engaging and imaginative premises around."
Cybergeneration
Page 58

"More than simply a conversion of the tabletop system."
Warhammer Fantasy Battle
Page 68

The icons

Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

Roleplaying systems

Collectable card games and expansions

Board games, miniature systems

Dice games and expansions

Computer games and utilities

Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10 Perfect. There's simply nothing better.
Score 9/10 Excellent; a classic. Highly recommended.
Score 8/10 Very good, with few problems. Recommended.
Score 7/10 Good, but not exceptional.
Score 6/10 Above average, but not without problems.
Score 5/10 Average, or a mixture of good and bad.
Score 4/10 Below average, but not without merit.
Score 3/10 Poor, crucially flawed in some way.
Score 2/10 Very poor; should be avoided.
Score 1/10 Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.

The index...

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Cybergeneration

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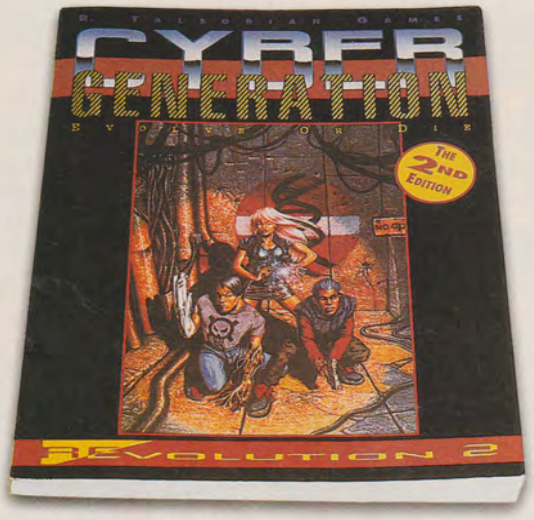


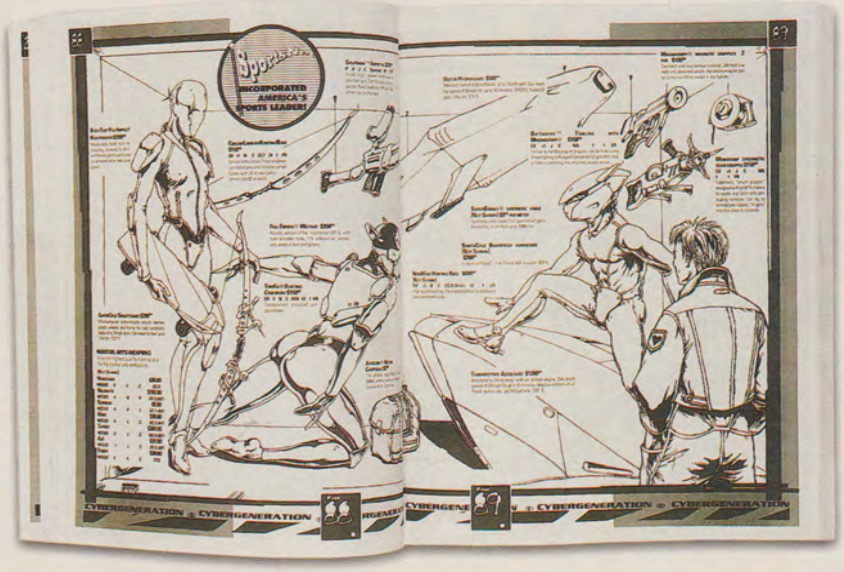
As a supplement for Cyberpunk 2020 it was hugely popular, but can Cybergeneration stand up on its own?

It's 2027, and things have changed in the seven years since the time of *Cyberpunk 2020*. The cyberpunk revolt against the immensely powerful megacorporations has failed, defeated by its own cynicism and short-sighted goals, crushed underfoot by the rise of a strong new US government. Formed from a corrupt union of political and business interests, the Incorporated States of America is set on introducing a new age of prosperity and growth to the once-mighty third-world nation, no matter what the cost.

But for the last two years a mysterious disease has been sweeping across the globe. Those over the age of 20 contracting it die a hideously painful death as their bodies literally dissolve, leaving behind nothing but piles of gooey, quivering flesh and peculiar carbon compounds. It took the ISA some time to realise that the effects of the disease on younger victims are far different. Many more children than adults seem to have been infected, but the so-called Carbon Plague doesn't kill them. Instead, it changes them irrevocably.

More than 10,000 gang members – the children of the cyberpunks – have already been infected. The plague has given them amazing new powers, abilities beyond anything possible with cyberware. Unable to understand, let alone control them, the ISA is intent on hunting them down. The kids themselves aren't too keen on this idea, and have decided to fight back.

Cybergeneration casts the players as a rag-tag group of gang members who have just started showing the symptoms of the Carbon Plague. On the run from the authorities, both corporate and



Rather than presenting players with yet another 'equipment list', *Cybergeneration*'s 'play as you go' approach gives the newly Changed characters a chance to visit a Virtual Mall where they can spend what little cash they have.

And the players said...

JAMES: *Cyberpunk* was a great game because of its attitude – and the same goes for *Cybergeneration*.

STEVE: It's amazing that one of the most combat-orientated RPGs ever can spawn something as thought-provoking as this.

EDDIE: And I thought that cyberpunk was a dead-end genre. I couldn't have been more wrong.

government, their only chance is a secret comm-code that friends have told them about. On entering the code into terminal, they are greeted by a simulation of the infamous Solo, Morgan Blackhand, who offers to help them.

While the original *Cybergeneration* book was a supplement for *Cyberpunk 2020*, this new edition is a stand alone game, containing all the rules you need to start playing. Yet what we have here is far more than just a re-print with some rules bolted on at the end. R Talsorian are one of the few roleplaying companies currently experimenting with the structure and layout of rules systems, and they haven't failed to carry their philosophy over to *Cybergeneration*.

Rather than following the traditional (and rather dry) 'introduction-character generation-rules-combat-background-equipment' format, the bulk of *Cybergeneration* follows the characters through their initial contact with the revolution, in the form of the Blackhand construct. The book is intended to be played through, with the characters being generated as you go along. Whenever the relevant rules are needed, they are included in 'referee only' sections. Soon you'll have a fully developed group ready to start a campaign. After this comes a detailed discussion of the world of 2027 and how to run *Cybergeneration*.

The rules themselves are a simplified version of the *Cyberpunk* system, using the familiar 1D10 + Skill + Attribute vs a Difficulty Number system to resolve tasks. Likewise, combat has been reduced to its bare bones, and is quick and easy to play.

The whole objective of the original *Cybergeneration* was to maintain the *Cyberpunk* world (with which R Talsorian is very happy) while shifting the emphasis away from the non-stop combat-fest that the game had devolved into and placing it on stronger roleplaying instead. And it's here that *Cybergeneration* succeeds. Rarely has there been a system that so strongly encourages roleplaying and thinking over big guns and statistics.

Because of their very nature, kids are unable to take on the might of the ISA directly – how much chance does a nine-year old have against a squad of trained security operatives in a firefight? To succeed, the players are forced to think for themselves and come up with less obvious strategies.

With this in mind, the book makes a real effort to help both referees and players with their roles, discussing

everything from drugs and sex to possible campaign concepts. There are many examples given, and a great deal of emphasis is placed on the atmosphere and 'feel' of the game. As with *Cyberpunk*, even the style of the writing reflects the game world's attitude.

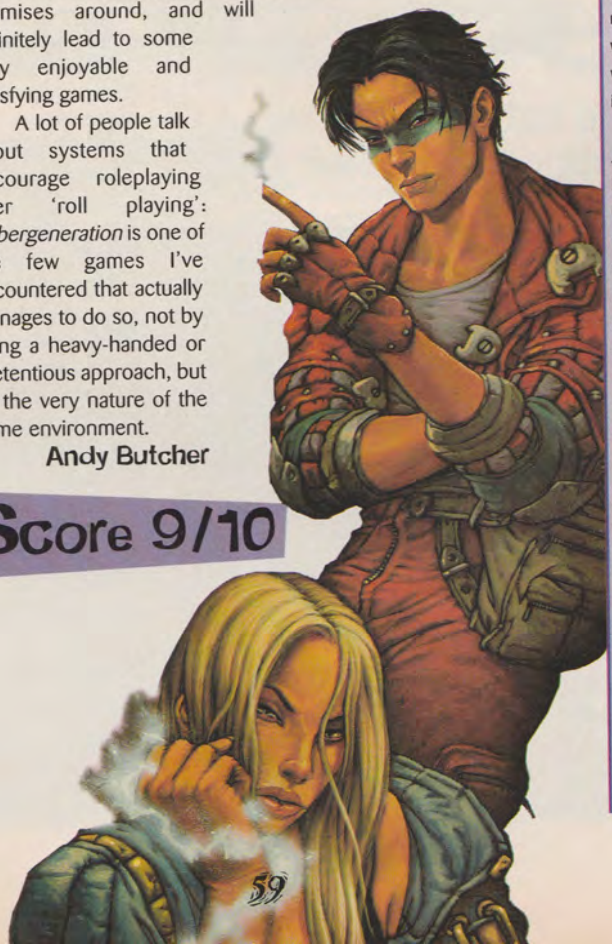
Cybergeneration is not an easy game to get right. There are few, if any, easy answers in the world that it depicts, and lots of gamers, especially newcomers to the hobby, may find the demands on their roleplaying skills rather tough going at first. However, it's more than worth the effort. *Cybergeneration* features one of the most engaging and imaginative premises around, and will definitely lead to some very enjoyable and satisfying games.

A lot of people talk about systems that encourage roleplaying over 'roll playing': *Cybergeneration* is one of the few games I've encountered that actually manages to do so, not by using a heavy-handed or pretentious approach, but by the very nature of the game environment.

Andy Butcher

Score 9/10

Each of the rule book's early chapters begins with a message from the Morgan Blackhand AI Construct, intended to be read aloud to the players. In this manner the characters are generated as you go along.



Evolve or Die!

Kids affected by the Carbon Plague undergo radical metabolic changes as the nanovirus reshapes them. They emerge as one of the Changed. In *Cybergeneration*, the CyberEvolved fall into one of five different types, chosen by the referee.

Tinmen

The warriors of the Cybergeneration, Tinmen have their limbs replaced by hexite, a silvery-black polycarbon compound of incredible strength and flexibility. By concentrating Tinmen can change the shape of their limbs, forming tentacles, spikes or blades. The most experienced can even form a gun around a handful of ammunition...

Scanners

Their entire nervous systems replaced by superconducting hexite polymers that act as incredibly sensitive antennae, Scanners can 'see', 'hear' and 'feel' the electrical impulses in nearby living things. Their reflexes are incredibly fast, and they are capable of delivering electric shocks by touch, although at great cost to themselves.

Wizards

Close cousins to the Scanners, Wizards have also had their nervous system replaced, but the 'tuning' of these systems is different, enabling them to connect with electronic devices. They can pick up any electromagnetic signals within a mile or so, and just by touching a phone line they can 'tap' into the calls. More importantly, their modified brains can communicate directly with computers. Effectively, a Wizard is a walking cybermodem, continually plugged into the global communications net.

Alchemists

Perhaps the strangest of all the CyberEvolved, Alchemists can exude nanomachines from their palms. Just by touching something they are able to determine its precise chemical makeup. With a little extra thought they can then re-arrange the molecular structure of any non-living material. An Alchemist can turn a lump of coal into a diamond. The best Alchemists can form complex machines from simple raw materials.

Bolters

The 'gunslingers' of the Changed, Bolters can 'throw' superconducting hexite wires from their wrists. They can control these wires' movements in mid-flight and send an incredibly powerful electrical charge flying down them. Bolters' nervous systems are effectively huge capacitors, capable of picking up enough charge from carpet static and temperature differentials to blow holes in walls.

A fantasy wargame for the PC

Warhammer: Shadow Of The Horned Rat

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Just warhammer without the miniatures, or something a little bit more interesting?

While roleplaying systems don't often translate very well into computer games, the same isn't necessarily true of wargames. With the computer there to worry about all the rules and numbers, the player is freed to concentrate on strategy and tactics. Which, of course, is the whole reason for playing in the first place. In addition, the computer format can solve some of the sticky problems that are hard to deal with on the tabletop – hidden troops, for example, can be truly 'hidden' by the computer simply not showing them. And, best of all for those of us who are, erm, 'artistically challenged', you don't have to paint a whole suitcase full of miniatures.

With *Warhammer: Shadow Of The Horned Rat*, though, Mindscape has been more ambitious. Rather than just being a computerised copy of the miniatures games, *Shadow Of The Horned Rat* makes use of the potential of the computer format to create a unique *Warhammer* game .

There are two key changes that achieve this. Firstly, whereas most *Warhammer* tabletop games take the form of a single battle, *Shadow Of The Horned Rat* casts you as the leader of a small band of mercenaries, intent on becoming as rich and famous as possible by selling your services to anyone in the war-torn Old World. This aspect of the game centres on the caravan of Dietrich, your accountant and 'business manager'. From here, you can see how much gold you currently have, examine your forces and read about any magic items, spells and races that you have encountered. Potential clients approach Dietrich, and then you can read briefings on any missions currently available.

Once you've chosen a mission, you then decide on which of your units to use. Regiments taking part in a mission must be paid more than those who sit around doing nothing, and so you must balance the danger of the job with the amount of gold you're being paid. Once you've made your decision, it's on to the battle itself.

It's here that the second major change becomes apparent. Rather than being played in turns, as in the tabletop

Warhammer: Shadow Of The Horned Rat even comes complete with a voucher giving you a £10 discount on the basic set of *Warhammer Fantasy Battle*, just in case the game happens to inspire you that much...

Warhammer: Shadow Of The Horned Rat will shortly be released for the Sony Playstation. Although there will be some differences, the core of the game will remain unchanged from the PC version.

"The battles alone would make a great game in their own right..."

game, *Shadow Of The Horned Rat* runs in real time. The game uses all of the *Warhammer* rules, but the action is continuous. Not only does this make things a lot more challenging – you can't simply sit there and think about what you're going to do – but it also adds immeasurably to the battle's sense of realism, especially when combined with the impressive 3D graphics. Regiments march across the battlefield in formation, breaking into a run as they charge the enemy, screaming their battle cries. Broken units turn and run in a ragged group as their pursuers bear down on them – it's impressive stuff, and it's easy to find yourself caught up in the action.

Throughout the game, animated sequences like this slowly reveal the forces of Chaos at work behind the scenes. Eventually, you'll come face to face with the source of the Evil, and (hopefully) save the Empire from complete destruction. Not bad, eh?

Put straightforwardly, *Warhammer: Shadow Of The Horned Rat* is a superb game. Although the battles alone would make a great game in their own right, the additional campaign structure element creates something that's more than simply a conversion of the tabletop system. In a typical *Warhammer* battle, winning is the only thing that matters, regardless of the cost. However, in *Shadow Of The Horned Rat*, you have to plan ahead. You can't afford to lose too many soldiers in a single fight, or the next mission will be that much harder. Although wounded troops recover, and dead ones can be replaced, this takes time, something that you may not have.

Even more impressive is the story that gradually unfolds as you play. The missions you take part in are not random – as time goes on, it becomes apparent that you're caught up in a plot hatched by the forces of Chaos, and the decisions you make can save – or, if they are not made wisely, doom – the Empire.

Impressive as it is, however, *Shadow Of The Horned Rat* is not without problems. The key difficulties lie in the battles, which can take some time to master, even if you're an experienced *Warhammer* player. Although the control system does an impressive job of making things as easy as possible, there's still a steep learning curve, and the game can often be rather frustrating to begin with.

Stick with it, though, and you'll find yourself becoming absorbed in both the individual fights and the overall story. Perhaps the most impressive thing about it is that you don't have to be a *Warhammer* player to enjoy this immensely. *Shadow Of The Horned Rat* stands up on its own merits – as a very clever mix of strategy and wargame.

I also wouldn't be surprised if it inspires a great number of existing *Warhammer* players to add some continuity to their battles – there're enough good ideas here to make you re-think the way you play your games.

Steve Faragher

Score 8/10

Mindscape are also working on a *Warhammer 40,000* game, due for release later this year, which will cast you as a Space Marine commander. The game will be played from a first-person perspective and involve lots of fighting (no surprises there).

THE SQUARE WINDOW

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The main window shows the battlefield in glorious 3D. You can scroll, zoom and rotate the view.

This map gives an overview of the battlefield and all the various regiments on both sides.

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The compass shows your current angle of view and the row of dots represents the Winds Of Magic.

Messages from friendly and enemy units are displayed here, alerting you to important events.

This panel displays units statistics and lets you select which magical items or spells to use.

A supplement for Warhammer 40,000

Codex: Angels Of Death

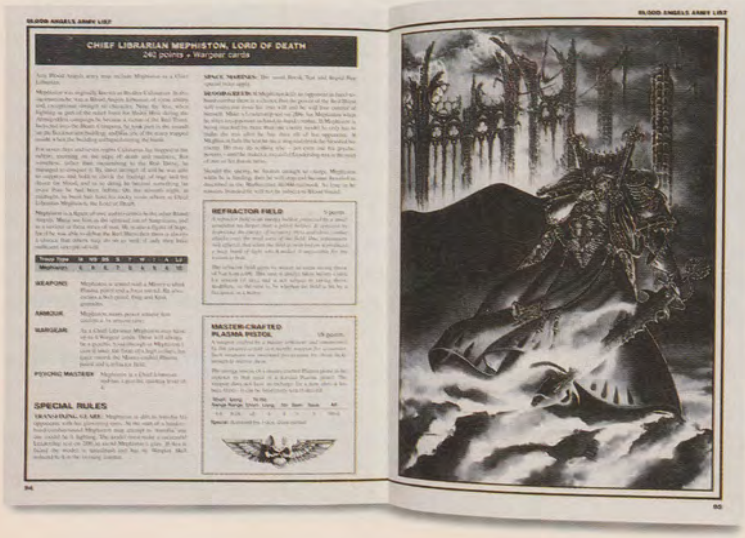
Codex: Angels of Death is the seventh *Codex* released in two years by Games Workshop. The next release for '96 is *Codex: Chaos*, which will be followed by *Codex: Imperial Agents*.

£9.99 Games Workshop

01773 713213 Out now

The book that proves there is more to Blood Angels and Dark Angels than just the colour of their armour...

Warhammer 40,000 players who have painted their Space Marine models red or dark green have been shouting for *Codex: Angels of Death* for the last two years. And now, finally, Blood Angel and Dark Angel commanders can lay their hands on their very own book, which takes an in-depth look at the origins, structure and character of these two Marine chapters, and provides rules that describe their distinctive style and unique capabilities.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SPECIAL RULES

REFRACTOR FIELD

MASTER-CRAFTED PLASMA PISTOL

The poles for the Space Marine warrior class have already been set by the two Marine Codices previously released. The Ultramarines rigidly adhere to the Imperial doctrine, and form the blueprint for all other Marines. The Space Wolves, on the other hand, are wild and tempestuous, with about as much respect for authority as students have for traffic cones. The question, then, is where do the Angels of Death fit in, and are they really any different from what has gone before?

The first part of the book casts the mood. It fleshes out the history and examines the motivations of the two Chapters, throwing in some ripping stories about the Primarchs to boot.

The Dark Angels are a serious, sober and devout lot. Styling themselves as warrior monks, extreme zealousness is their forte and they'll take no nonsense from any alien, heretical, affront-to-all-that-is-holy types. However, they conceal a terrible and shameful secret – there is a stain upon their honour. So the Chapter has embarked on an intergalactic scouring mission in order to rub out the blemish – along with anyone else they happen to meet along the way.

Meanwhile, the Blood Angels have their own cross to bear. Most of their number are picked from the last vestiges of humanity embattled on the hell-planet of Baal. This planet has suffered one Chernobyl-type incident too many, so most of the warriors recruited are shambling DNA disasters. Not to worry, though, because a quick infusion with the blood of Sanguinius turns them into statuesque beauties.

Unfortunately, people never learn that all that mucking about with blood sacrifices and everlasting beauty products always leads to rather obsessive, degrading behaviour and some sort of curse. Thus the Blood Angels just can't take their minds off blood. They are tortured by visions of death and, as the red mist of fury descends, many succumb to madness, and only lust to quench their thirst in a depraved frenzy of killing.

So, how is the flavour of the background material translated by the

The book contains full organisational and heraldic details for both Chapters. Thus a dangerous thought occurs... what if I could collect miniatures for them all?

rules? Certainly, the psychologically resilient Deathwing and lightning-fast Ravenwing (see right) are well-balanced representations of the horrors that the Dark Angels bear, and their resultant compulsion to hunt across the Galaxy; but the regular troops are basically the same as the Ultramarines.

Similarly, the Death Company and veteran assault troops typify the blood-thirsty nature of the Blood Angels, but again these are minor tweaks. In the *Angels Of Death* Codex, the style of the army is largely determined by the new special characters and their wargear.

The Dark Angels' characters are all 'hard', but certainly not supreme in hand-to-hand combat. However, their resolute faith makes their spirit unbreakable, and their holy relics have a major impact upon the army. It's very easy to imagine this lot making a defiant last stand around the Sacred Banner, drawing inspiration from its righteous cause.

On the other hand, the Blood Angel characters are all homicidal loonies with only one ambition – to get up close and personal. They are completely geared up to perform open heart surgery, and sport a range of wargear to encourage the rest of the army to forget about the plan and charge in with wild abandon. It all seems rather apt, really.

There is just enough in this book to make the Blood Angels or Dark Angels a satisfying alternative to playing one of the other Space Marine armies. Neither army is a radical departure from the Ultramarines, but they both have a twist that makes them worthwhile. Especially when you consider the miniature figures – the Dark Angel warrior-monk models are particularly evocative.

The gap in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe was much smaller for this Codex than it was for the others. So there is,

"On the plus side, this is the most professionally produced Codex to date"

necessarily, much repetition of previously released material, and it does not advance the scope of the rules of the game as much as the other Codices.

One major gripe, though; why does it not contain the datafax for the Razorback? Is it just an oversight that this Space Marine vehicle's rules can only be found in another supplement costing £9.99? Or are more sinister forces at work?

On the plus side, this is the most professionally produced Codex to date. It's clear, comprehensive and contains some great art, especially on the stormy front cover. If you want just one Space Marine Codex, then get this. If you want to command a Blood Angel or Dark Angel army, then get this. Otherwise, you may already have most of this book in a different guise.

Mark Donald

Score 7/10

Games Workshop will be releasing a dedicated Ravenwing land speeder, in addition to a plastic Space Marine bike, which will be in the same bracket as the Ork warbike and the Eldar jetbike.

The *Codex* contains ten special characters and twelve new wargear cards. They include the Red Grail which, at a cost of 100 points, is the most expensive wargear card in *Warhammer 40K*. Lucky Blood Angels.

The book also tells of the origin of the feud between Lion El'Jonson and Leman Russ, as well as revealing the Dark Angels' ultimate secret known only to the Emperor. Gripping stuff.

Deviant by Design!

The joy of commanding the Blood Angels or Dark Angels is that they've never felt too encumbered by all that *Codex: Astartes* baggage. Model Chapters they're not! Here's a look at the unique ways in which they assert their identity...

Dark Angels

Deathwing: the Chapter's veteran company. All members are immune to psychology; this includes all Terminators, Librarians, important Chaplains and other high-ranking characters.

Ravenwing: the rapid response company, specialising in the use of bikes and land speeders. These vehicles may be chosen as squadrons from the squad section of the army list. Because Ravenwing are experts in hit-and-run warfare, they may re-roll skid tests, ignore modifiers for firing at fast speed and 'jink' their vehicles, making them more difficult to hit.

Wargear:

The Standard of Retribution, which enables Dark Angels to inflict at least one blow in mêlées even when they lose the combat.

The Standard of Fortitude, which inspires Dark Angels to move and rapid-fire in the same turn.

The Standard of Devastation, which enables Dark Angels who are charged to fire upon their assailants as if they were on overwatch.

Blood Angels

Death Company: now with jump packs. Otherwise still the same loveable, frenzied madmen with a terminal craving for blood.

Veterans: uniquely among the marines, all non-Terminator Blood Angel veterans are assault troops; costing only 30 points more than a regular squad, they're a bit tasty.

Chief Librarian Mephiston: is a vampire. He boasts inhuman stats, a transfixing glare, curious table manners that manifest themselves as blood-greed, and (naturally) all his own teeth.

Wargear:

The Red Grail: a chalice of Primarch blood that endows all nearby Blood Angels with a +2 movement bonus and +1 weapon skill/strength bonus.

Shroud of Sanguinius: a device that sorts out any Blood Angels who aren't keen to muck in and frenzy.

Death Mask of Sanguinius: as modelled by Commander Dante, it causes terror.

A campaign setting for AD&D

Dark Sun

Revised edition

£18.50 TSR 01223 212 517 Out now

TSR's revision to the campaign world of Athas proves that there is, after all, something new under the dark sun.

Athas has no gods, just grotesquely corrupt and violent sorcerer kings, so the moral majority shouldn't be offended.

Even though you may not have come across it before, Athas has been around for a long while now. In that time, the hostile, eco-ravaged world of TSR's *Dark Sun* campaign has undergone extraordinary political and physical change.

TSR have now decided that it's about time to acknowledge all these changes, and have therefore revised the campaign setting to take them into account. The first task they have undertaken is to expand the campaign area by a factor of eight, bringing existing Athasian adventurers up to date and welcoming new heroes into the fold.

Opening the box, you'll find three large colour maps (one of them printed on cloth, which seems like a nice idea, but it's rather harder to read as a consequence), a referee's screen and four books.

Two are rule books – *The Age of Heroes* and *The Way of the Psionicist* – while one of the remaining pair, under the title *The Wanderer's Chronicle*, is the campaign world description, and the other is a beginning adventure, *Mystery of the Ancients*.

Although nearly all *AD&D* campaign worlds introduce rules that are supplementary to the core set, Athas goes further than most.

Life on Athas is particularly tough and short. Never mind the monsters; failing to take enough water on a desert crossing can be fatal. As a consequence, the rules for character generation have been modified so that play lasts longer than the average game of *Space Invaders*.

For a start, all characters begin at third level with the requisite experience and hit points. Furthermore, ability scores (strength and so on) now range from 3 to 24 instead of the more usual 3 to 18, which is great because it means you can now get a damage adjustment of up to +8 on successful strikes.

The range of humanoid races available is drastically different from that of most campaigns; it's now possible to play a half-giant or a sentient insect, for

"Life on Athas is particularly tough and short. Never mind the monsters; failing to take enough water on a desert crossing can be fatal"

Three large, colourful maps provide details topographical and geograpical of the world of Athas, now expanded to eight times its original size (the terrain is still mostly desert, though). The large-scale map, detailing the central campaign area and shown here, is printed on cloth and will double as a tea towel at a pinch.

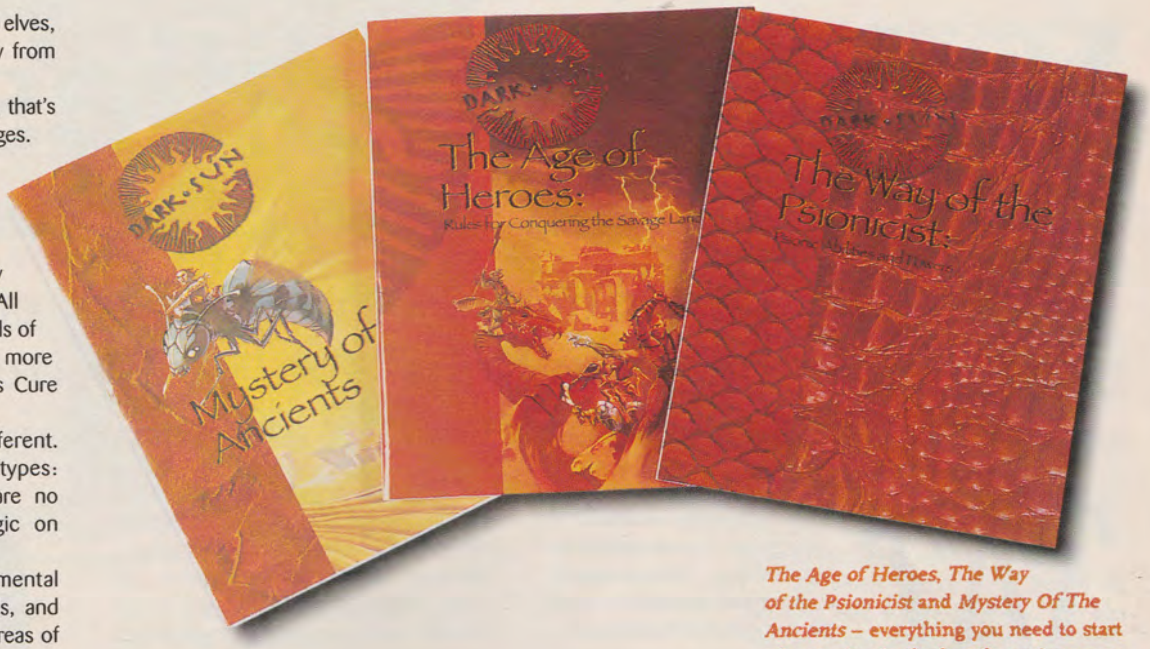
instance. And even the likes of elves, dwarves and halflings differ greatly from their more common counterparts.

It's the magic system, though, that's undergone the most drastic changes. The premise behind Athas is that it has never had, and never will have, any true gods. Priests are instead allied to one of the four elemental planes, from which they draw their specialised spells. All priests also gain access to the 'Spells of the Cosmos', a list that includes more generalised enchantments such as Cure Light Wounds.

Wizardly magic is also different. Wizards are divided into two types: defilers and preservers. (There are no specialist schools, because magic on Athas is so rare.)

Defilers drain the environmental energy around them to cast spells, and are considered evil. Surrounding areas of vegetation turn to ash whenever defilers prepare spells; hence the current barren state of the planet.

Preservers, on the other hand, are in the bleeding-heart, *Guardian*-reading camp. They take extra special care when preparing their spells and only extract as much energy from the environment as they need, avoiding nasty side effects. Preservers, not to mention druids, don't look too kindly on defilers. Nevertheless, both types of wizard are rare.



The Age of Heroes, The Way of the Psionicist and *Mystery Of The Ancients* – everything you need to start adventuring in the hostile environment of Athas. Everything, that is, except for a decent pair of shades.

Psi of relief – it's all in the mind

Psionics always used to be an optional extra to the *AD&D* rules. When the *2nd Edition* came out, psionics was relegated from the core rule books to *The Complete Psionics Handbook*. But with *Dark Sun*, psionics aren't optional – every player character has psionic abilities, as do many NPCs.

A self-contained booklet, *The Way of the Psionicist*, is included with the new *Dark Sun* boxed set. Re-presenting the rules contained in the *Player's Option: Skills and Powers* supplement (reviewed last month), it contains all the information you will need to referee psionic abilities.

These rules are refined-and-streamlined versions of those presented with the original *AD&D* set. Psionic abilities are determined by a character's wisdom, constitution and intelligence scores. Any character with sufficiently high scores and a certain amount of luck (or any player character at all in the *Dark Sun* world) will have some psionic talent, and be known as a 'wild talent'. Wild talents are able to employ the basic attack and defense psionic strategies, and use one or two spell-like psionic abilities.

Characters can also choose to become a member of the psionicist character class. A psionicist is much like a wizard, except that his powers derive from his mind rather than external agencies. As psionicists rise in experience, they gain access to more attack and defence strategies and to more and more spell-like powers.

The psionics system has been changed to bring it much closer to the rules for physical mêlée. Characters have psionic strength points (PSPs – much like the more familiar hit points) and mental armour classes (MACs). Attacking involves expending PSPs, making a 'to hit' roll against the target's MAC and, if successful, subtracting PSPs as damage from it. Similarly, the spell-like psionic abilities (teleport, telekinesis, etc) also have MACs and cost PSPs. To successfully use an ability, a character has to roll the ability's MAC score or higher.

It's a much more logical set-up than was previously in use. It's a matter of taste, though, as to whether you think there's any need for spell-like psionic powers when the game already supports such a wide variety of magical styles.

Metal is so rare on Athas that most characters arm themselves with weapons of bone, stone or wood, which are less likely to hit targets and inflict less damage when they do.

Psionics are the major mode of supernatural activity on Athas (refer to the panel on the left-hand side of this page). Many thousands of years ago, through a combination of major psionic powers and defiler magic, a number of individuals set themselves up as sorcerer kings, each ruling one of the city states strewn across Athas's sandy wastes.

The resulting societies are strongly hierarchical, heavily reliant on slaves, and partial to blood sports. Campaign time starts shortly after a number of these sorcerer kings have been deposed – it is a time of great change, a time of heroes...

There's plenty of atmosphere in *Dark Sun* and, despite the seeming uniformity of the geography, a great deal of imagination has gone into detailing its various regions.

It's a shame, then, that this is let down by the somewhat lacklustre adventure that comes with the set. It's short and extremely linear, leaving players with little chance to alter the outcome.

All the same, if blood in the sand is the bag you're into, you'll find plenty to enjoy under the *Dark Sun*.

Cliff Ramshaw

Score 7/10

A sourcebook for Shadowrun

Virtual Realities 2.0

£12.99 FASA Corp 001 312 243 5660 Out now

faster, meaner and a whole lot easier to get to grips with: the global computer matrix of 2057 will never be the same again...

William Gibson's concept of cyberspace – a virtual reality representing the world's communication network and all the computers attached to it – is a central part of every cyberpunk roleplaying system. Unfortunately, while it's a neat idea, it often causes some real difficulties for both referees and players.

Under *VR 2.0* rules, decker duels can finally be to the death – new attack programs based on black ice code allow characters to physically hurt each other while in the Matrix...

It's all due to the solitary nature of 'hacking'. Whenever a computer expert wants to use his or her skills, the other players have to sit around waiting while the referee deals with situation. And as every ref knows, nothing makes players more unhappy than boredom.

In *Shadowrun*, the situation has always been exacerbated by the game's complex Matrix rules – to the point where many referees simply don't allow player-character deckers in their games. To make matters worse, the original *Virtual Realities* supplement actually made things more complicated.

Virtual Realities 2.0 takes a different approach. Rather than simply adding more rules and clarifying previous ones, it offers a completely new system for dealing with deckers and the Matrix, designed to simplify and streamline the process and make for faster play. In addition, the book details some of the latest developments in the technology of *Shadowrun*'s game world. Players in existing campaigns shouldn't despair, though – there's no need to throw away your old gear because the new system uses most of the same programs and decks as before, just in different ways.

"And as every ref knows, nothing makes players more unhappy than boredom"

CENTRAL METAPHOR
DECKING THE SATELLITE
A datastream passes the ominous sculpted construct of the Atlantean Foundation looming in the Seattle Matrix.
Using stolen algorithms, Omnispien triggers a vanishing SAN that gives him a sactlink to the Renraku Military host. The real trick is jamming it open long enough to get out the same way.

The first major change is in the way computer systems (referred to as 'hosts') and the connections between them ('grids') are described. Previously, the individual nodes of a system had to be mapped out. Not only was this unrealistic – the computers being dealt with would be far larger and more elaborate – but it also added to referee's preparation time, and made it almost impossible to generate a system quickly during play.

VR 2.0 drops this entirely. A host is simply described by a System Rating and Security Sheaf, as well as any important details such as valuable data stored on it or security systems controlled by it.

The System Rating contains all the important rules information about the

As with its predecessor, *Virtual Realities 2.0* contains some stunning computer-generated artwork that gives a good feel for what the Matrix actually looks like.

host or grid, and consists of the familiar 'colour-number' Security Rating and a new set of Subsystem Ratings. These describe the difficulty of getting the host to do something, divided into Access, Control, Index, Files and Slave tasks. For example, a fairly typical corporate host might be described as Orange-7/10/12/10/9/9.

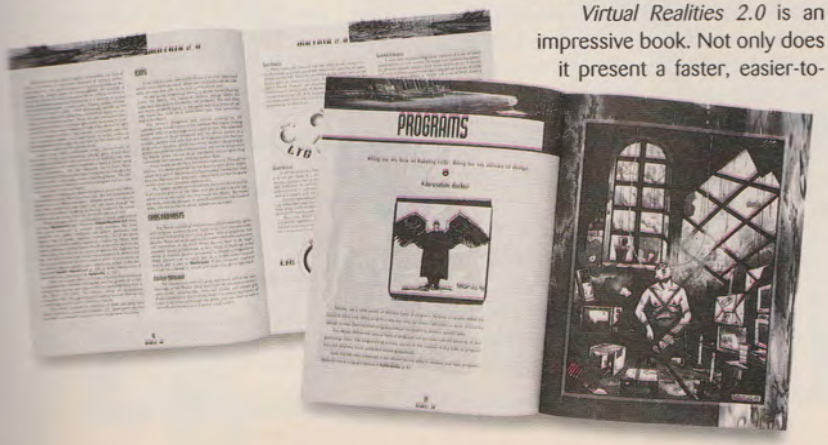
The Subsystem Ratings form the basis of the new decking rules. When breaking into and manipulating a host or grid illegally, a decker rolls his Computer skill against a target number based on one of the Subsytem Ratings, reduced by any relevant program being used.

For example, to log on to a host, a decker rolls against the Access value, reduced by the value of his or her Deception program. At the same time, the host rolls its Security Value (the number in the Security Rating) against the decker's Detection Factor (the average of the deck's Masking Rating and the rating of any Sleaze program being run). If the decker achieves more successes than the host, the task was a success.

Regardless of the result, any successes achieved by the host or grid are noted and added to a running total. This Security Tally is then compared to the host's Security Sheaf, a list of security measures and trigger steps. When the decker's Security Tally equals or exceeds a trigger step, the system activates the relevant security, whether it be an Intrusion Countermeasures program, an alert, or even shutting down.

Essentially, that's all there is to the new decking system. The bulk of the rest of the book is taken up with explaining how the existing programs and deck ratings work in the new system; revised cybercombat rules; an updated section on deck construction and program writing; and discussions of system design and security. In addition, there are chapters covering Artificial Intelligences and the Otaku – the mysterious children who can access and manipulate the Matrix without a cyberdeck.

Virtual Realities 2.0 is an impressive book. Not only does it present a faster, easier-to-understand set of Matrix rules, but it does so without sacrificing depth or variety. In fact, it does quite the opposite – the system actually gives deckers more flexibility, and allows them to perform more tasks than before.



Much of the *Shadowrun* fiction refers to the 'state of the art' and the continual development of new Matrix technology. *VR 2.0* includes optional rules to model this, with decks and programs slowly degrading in effectiveness over time. To keep their edge, deckers now have to spend time and money refining their equipment.

Because nearly all of the tests made in *Virtual Realities 2.0* are based on Computer skill, the system emphasises the character's abilities over hot decks and high level programs. In fact, it's possible to achieve almost anything with just a deck and no utility programs at all – the utilities just make things easier.

The key to this success lies in the amount of time that's obviously been spent on developing a logical Matrix system from the ground up. Rather than being full of specific rules for different situations, *Virtual Realities 2.0* has been designed around a core system that can cope with just about every situation and, most importantly of all, makes sense.

In addition, making the system more abstract greatly speeds it up, both in playing and in preparation. Descriptions are left almost completely up to the referee and player to roleplay out.

So when you're in a hurry, or breaking into a minor system, you can resolve things simply with the numbers. For more important runs, you can describe everything that occurs with as much detail as you like – limited only by your imagination – rather than being restricted by the rules themselves.

In fact, there are only two real problems with the book. First, it's not particularly well laid out; early chapters make frequent reference to concepts and rules that are not explained until later. Admittedly, this is in the nature of the new system – it works as a coherent whole, so explaining only one part of it isn't easy.

What the book really needs is an extended example of play, detailing an entire run in the Matrix from start to finish (and thus covering as many situations as possible). This could easily have been achieved by dropping some of the fiction.

The other gripe is the Otaku. Although the rules for them work well, the explanation of their powers is a cop-out. Not the most important of problems, but considering how much speculation there's been about them, it's likely that a lot of people will be disappointed.

Overall, though, *Virtual Realities 2.0* is one of the most impressive *Shadowrun* rules supplements ever, and any referee who has even the slightest interest in player-character deckers will find it indispensable. It doesn't solve all the problems, but it makes things a lot easier.

Andy Butcher

Score 8/10

Throwing Stones

Tubes of Dice £7.95 **Rule Book £6.99**

Gamesmiths Inc 001 310 322 0924 **Out now**

Not the sort of thing you'd recommend to people in glass houses then.

I'd heard about *Throwing Stones* a long time before I actually got to see it and it confused the Hell out of me. What was it? A dice game like *Dragon Dice*? A roleplaying game? Well, the answer is both... sort of.

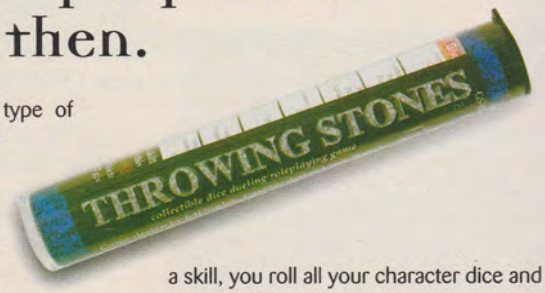
If you have a look at the stats in *Throwing Stones* you'll notice that the beginning letters spell S.I.A.D.E.K. The game's designed by Jeff Siadek. Genius or loser? Only you can decide.

You buy the game in tubes, each tube contains seven assorted character dice, one monster die and an ordinary D6. The character dice are randomly selected from 21 different fantasy types ranging from the predictable barbarians and thieves to the more exciting samurai and zoetrists. Included with each tube is a basic set of duelling rules allowing you to pit one character against another.

"This is a system with the potential to work well once you've got past the impenetrable rules"

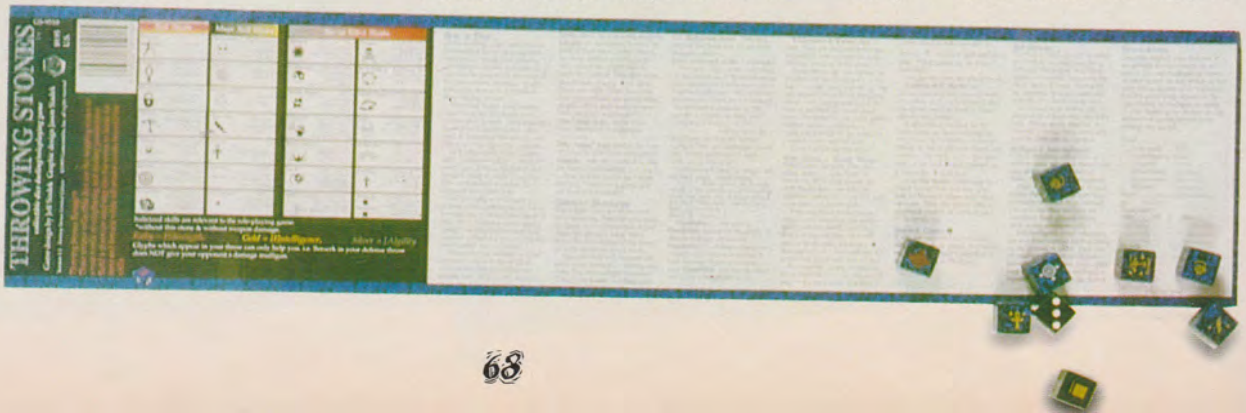
Hang on a minute, you cry, characters? Where did they come into it? I've only just bought me tube. And what are character dice anyway?

And here is the (very) clever thing about *Throwing Stones*. The character dice *are* your character. Each of the 21 dice represents a different type of character. Glyphs printed on each face of a die represent different skills and each face is one of three colours to represent one of the three main stats; Strength, Intelligence and Agility. The thief dice, for example, has one glyph representing the balance skill group (acrobatics, climbing and stealth), two representing the dexterity skill group (lock-picking, pilfering and quick-drawing), one representing the notice skill group (perception, tracking and smelling), one representing the stun special effect and one representing the luck special effect. Of these glyphs, four are coloured silver, denoting agility, one is red for strength and the last is gold for intelligence.



To create a beginning character you choose four of the stones you have and total up the different colours to see what stats you have (see the panel on the right for a little more detail). If you want to use a skill, you roll all your character dice and see how many glyphs of the appropriate type come up. Compare that to a difficulty level (often set by your opponent rolling his dice) and you'll find out whether or not you've succeeded. Simple eh? And when your character goes up a level, you just choose another dice to add to your existing four.

Choosing your four stones gives you great flexibility in designing your character, there are no restrictions on what dice you choose so you might start with a thief dice, a barbarian dice, a wizard dice and a gladiator dice. The rub is of course that you can only choose character dice that you actually have. Want a wizard dice but haven't got one? Er, buy another tube or try to trade with a friend. That doesn't work? Er, buy another tube... and so on. This game can get very expensive, too quickly, compared to any other RPG that is. Especially when the glyphs start to wear off your stones (which will happen,



Here's what you get for your money: nine dice and a sheet of paper. It's all a bit expensive isn't it?

The roleplaying book goes into greater detail about the various glyphs and what they represent than the instruction sheet that comes with the game. Unfortunately it's badly organised and written.

And the players said...

ANDY: "It's a great idea, but I'm not convinced that it'll be worth buying."

MARYANNE: "I like the dice, they seem to make it all a lot easier, although they confused me at first."

JON: "I don't like it at all. It doesn't feel right. Where's my D20?"

believe me). Then you might get *very* upset about how much this is all costing . Refs take heart though, there is a chance that players will buy stones of their own rather than you getting everything as usual. So it's not all bad news.

What is bad news is that you only get a small booklet with the stones themselves that details how combat is handled. This is an attempt to get people to buy *Throwing Stones* as a stand alone combat game à la *Dragon Dice*. Unfortunately the booklet is very poor. After several hours of playing the duelling game I was still unclear about exactly how some of the rules worked. For a bit of clarification I turned to the roleplaying book (yet another expense, tsk). Unfortunately this turned out to be an even bigger mess than the booklet, giving the impression of something just thrown together with little thought.

Read the rule book through once and then throw it away and make up your own house rules, you're bound to do a better job than the game designers. I'm afraid that the rule book is one of the worst things I've ever read. It's unclear, it's inconsistent, it's full of naff fantasy clichés and it's very poorly written. There's even a solo adventure that's so full of errors it's practically unfinishable.

So let's recap on what we've got here. One fantastic idea for a set of roleplaying mechanics; something that at last does away with the character sheet while still providing an easy to understand and coherent approach to gaming. Hooray for that. Several sets of over-expensive dice that will wear out on you. Boo for that. And a very messy background book that belongs firmly in roleplaying's dark ages.

This is a system with the potential to work well once you've got past the impenetrable rules, but just too much has not been properly thought out. It's all very well adding a dice a level, but what about when you've got a 20th level character? How would you fancy rolling 23 dice every time you tried to pick a lock?

What a shame that such a fantastic idea is so shoddily presented. Do get hold of a set and have a look though. It might just change the way you look at roleplaying mechanics for ever.

Steve Faragher

Score 5/10

I'M SORRY: JUST HOW DOES THAT WORK?

Gratel The Great

Just to show you what one looks like. Gratel is now a third level character and has therefore added two stones to her original set. Her durability (ie hit points) is calculated by adding her strength to the number of dice she has. In order to progress to the next level and add another dice she must earn a total of experience and karma points equal to her current number of stones squared, or 36. The level after that will require 49 points, then 64 and so on. Experience points earned are equal to the number of dice of a creature or character killed or represent an arbitrary award for successfully using skill. Karma is earned for good roleplaying.

These are her six dice:

1 Thief

2 Assassin

3 Duelist

3 Gladiator

5 Assassin

6 Duelist

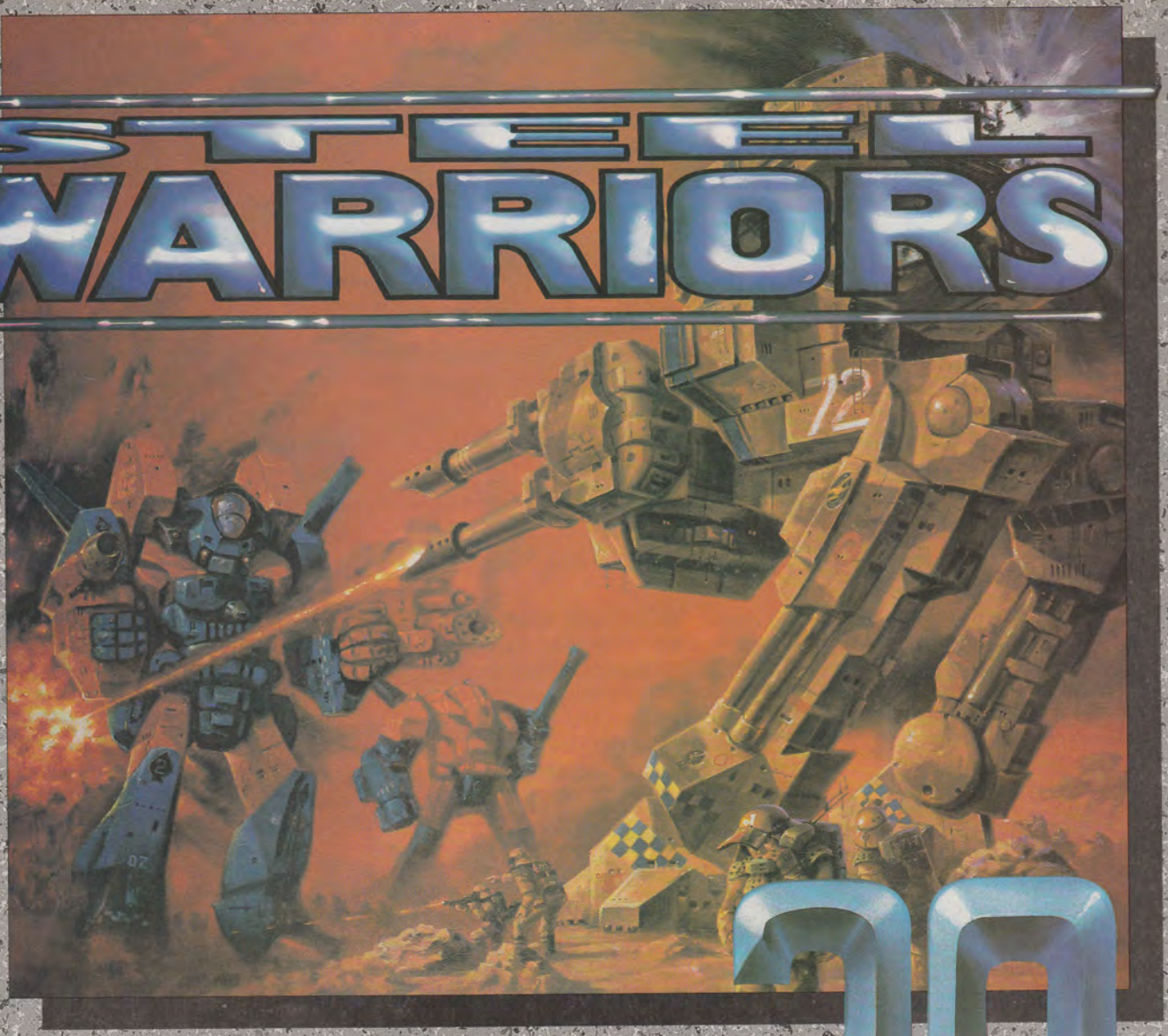
Which give her these stats.

Strength: 13
Intelligence: 10
Agility: 13
Durability: 19/19
Experience: 1
Karma: 7

Gratel's a very good fighter as you'd expect with her selection of character dice. She's just as likely to disarm her opponent in combat as run him through, and she's very well balanced with that equal mixture of strength and agility.

Gamesmiths intend to produce sets of dice for Superhero, Western, Horror, Cyber and Future games in the near future. They will all be compatible with the fantasy stones. Let's hope they take the opportunity to tidy it all up a bit.

STEEL WARRIORS



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Anvil Of Dawn

A roleplaying game for the PC
£39.99 US Gold/New World Computing 0121 625 3366
486 PC with CD-ROM and 4MB RAM
Out now

Why is that the governments of fantasy worlds always wait until an evil warlord has amassed a vast horde of vicious soldiers and unimaginable magical power until they decide to do something about it? You'd have thought that any

King or Queen worth the title would have a small army of spies constantly scouring the land, constantly on the look-out for any up-and-coming dictators, so as to nip the problem in the bud.

Unfortunately for the world of Tempest, its rulers didn't possess this degree of foresight, and so the fate of the entire planet rests on the tried-and-tested 'small group of heroes winning out against all the odds' plan. The other four candidates have all been sent on various missions, so you get left with the most dangerous of all – being teleported behind enemy lines in search of a method for defeating the Warlord's sorcerous powers.

Despite the sheer insanity of this plan, *Anvil Of Dawn* is a remarkably fun game. The development team, DreamForge Intertainment, has a lot of experience in computer roleplaying, and it shows. An elegant game system combines with simple controls and generally impressive graphics to produce an enjoyable romp through a huge game world and numerous locations. As with nearly all computer RPGs, this is still limited to hack-and-slash; but it's hack-and-slash raised to an art form. *Anvil Of Dawn* is ultimately limited, but it's so easy to get into that it hardly matters.

Andy Butcher **Score 8/10**

Dungeon Master Screen & Master Index

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There is a truly terrifying beast that haunts all *AD&D* game worlds. It has the power to overwhelm the mightiest warriors and to stupefy the wisest priest.

The Nightmare Lands

A Ravenloft Campaign supplement for AD&D

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sod 'to sleep, perchance to dream'! take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing, hack them to pieces!

On the borders of *Ravenloft*'s Demiplane Of Dread is the mist-shrouded netherworld called the Nightmare Lands. Here, a court of 'demons' feeds, vampire-like, on the fears expressed in people's dreams. This Nightmare Court seeks out and traps unwitting dreamers in 'dreamscapes', where their secret weaknesses – anxiety, confusion, fear, frustration, guilt, and so on – are amplified to intolerable proportions. Mentally assaulted night after night, such dreamers rapidly become insane – unless, that is, the Nightmare being conducting the torture can be defeated.

Through the *Journal of Doctor Illhousen* (Book One of this set) players are introduced to the concept of Nightmare adventures. They are told how to reach the Nightmare Lands, both physically and as dream beings, in order to aid those enduring the attentions of the Court. Sketchy and theoretical, the journal outlines the bizarre nature of a world where reality shifts in the blink of an eye.

The *Rules Of Dreams and Nightmares* (Book Two) fully explains the complexities of Nightmare adventures and the key principle of Mental Fortitude. This is, essentially, a character's self-confidence in his or her 'dreamself' – and it is increased by facing their worst nightmare, which eventually allows them to break free of the Court's tortures.

The *Book Of Nightmares* (Book Three) and *Monstrous Supplement* (Book Four) combine to provide an off-the-shelf scenario for parties ready to risk adventuring in a land of dream madness. With their bizarre cast of opponents and places, these

Four books bring to life the bizarre dreamworld of the Nightmare Lands – but it's not an easy one to referee.

books flesh out the Nightmare Lands into a truly horrific place to explore (and to DM).

The ideas behind the Nightmare Lands are intriguing and exciting. They provide an arena in which a party of any level can truly be tested. The appeal of the Nightmare Court, though, is limited by its inevitable association with the gothic *Ravenloft*.

In this setting it works well and all *Ravenloft* DMs should be encouraged to give their parties a bad night's sleep every once in a while. The ready-to-run scenario Nightmares, however, may not sit readily with heroes from other places and planes in the multiverse.

It is in the running of a Nightmare Lands campaign, though, that the worst problems can arise. Mental Fortitude is a good system, but it requires better examples, better explanation and easy-access tables or checklists before it can function effectively. Further, the very blurred nature of Nightmare reality causes continued questions for the DM and impairs the necessary suspension of disbelief for the players.

The Nightmare Lands is a brave attempt to add another element to *D&D* adventures. It conjures a scary new world where absolutely anything and everything can happen. It's a place I'd love to visit as a player – but I wouldn't want to live there.

Trenton Webb

Score 7/10

This beast is know as the Waffling Rulebook – and it must be destroyed.

The Dungeon Master Screen and Master Index set embarks on this very quest. As its title suggests, this is a supplement of two distinct parts: Screen and Index. The screen supplies DMs with a complete list of tables for quick reference, while the Index codifies rules and lists from the seven core *D&D* books.

The title 'Screen' is a misnomer, since there are in fact two of the things. Splattered with tables and diagrams, they carry every table – from critical hits, through miscellaneous equipment up to the location of the various planes. It's all here, so all you have to do is find it. Which can prove a little tricky, since the screens were obviously laid out by Jackson Pollock.

The two indices contained within the Master Index on the other hand are an exercise in clear and concise functionality. These detail every rule, adjustment, bonus, modifier, magic item, spell, scroll (and sundry other stuff) ever mentioned in the history of ever – all in alphabetical order and cross-referenced with their location in the seven key tomes. Using the effective notation system, it's easy to find anything from Aarakocra (p41 of *Skills and Powers*, reference fans) to *Zone Of Truth* (p62 of *Tome Of Magic*). The only problem is that you have to think in TSR terms and titles to find the entry.

The index is essential stuff; the screens less so, since most DMs have evolved their own screen or alternative system for ready reference. But it's well worth £6 to be able to quickly find every rule you know you've read but forgotten precisely where...

Trenton Webb **Score 7/10**

Technical Readout 3058

A BattleTech sourcebook

$18 (£12-ish) FASA Corporation 001 312 243 5660 Out now

The technology of the 31st century continues to develop apace. But is the new state of the art worth the extra cash?

Six years after the signing of the Truce of Tukayyid, the peace between the Inner Sphere and the Clans, though fragile at the best of times, is still holding. Neither side honestly expects it to hold out the full fifteen years, though, and so rearmament is at the top of the agenda. And so we see the release of the latest Comstar Technical Readout regarding the fighting machines of the Thirty-First Century.

Having been in decline since the collapse of the Star League, the technological capabilities of the Successor States are enjoying a renaissance since the return of the Clans. Through analysis of captured Clan equipment and of technological data (both from Comstar and from other, unidentified sources), a new generation of conventional craft and BattleMechs has been created, ready for the final battle against the invaders.

First to be discussed are conventional forces – they are pale shadows of the BattleMechs in terms of capability and firepower, but there is still the need for these smaller, specialist units. Often, in fact, their ease of construction and minimal cost makes them viable where the complexities of BattleMech production rule Mechs out.

Many of those listed are newer models of previously designed vehicles such as the Galleon or the Striker Light Tanks. All retain the original design features but, with the addition of recovered technological know-how, have been given a new lease of life. (Though having said this, I wouldn't want to take on a star of Clan OmniMechs in any of them.) Ranging from scout vehicles and transports to main battle tanks and helicopter gunships, there's enough choice for the most discerning low-budget mercenary unit – God help 'em!

Next we come to the real contenders on the battlefield: the Inner Sphere BattleMechs, fresh from the production lines and ready for battle. Again, many of these are redesigned versions of older Mechs, such as the Firestarter – always popular for frying infantry with. With the inclusion of modular design, all of these now have a number of weapons configurations available, providing them with a whole new range of capabilities.

The remainder of the Inner Sphere Mechs are new designs, representing the cutting edge in design from the Noble Houses and Comstar. There are thirty-five Mechs listed here, each presented in the standard *Technical Readout* format (though eight are presented in full colour, adding to the overall high-standard of the sourcebook).

Finally there are eighteen Clan Mech designs – again, a mix of existing Mechs and new designs. As with the Inner Sphere Mechs, these are presented with their modular weapon configurations in the standard format, giving a chilling representation of the Clans and their military capabilities.

Like previous *Technical Readouts*, the *3058* edition is an essential sourcebook for both players and referees of *BattleTech* or *Mechwarrior*.

Alex Bund

Score 7/10

Druid: Daemons Of The Mind

A roleplaying game for the PC
£39.99 Mindscape/Sir-tech
01444 246333
486 PC with CD-ROM, 4MB RAM and SVGA Out now

So there you are, happily minding your own business and living out a nice, uneventful life, when all of a sudden you're transported to a strange world that you thought existed only in your dreams. Sound familiar?

In *Druid*, the world in question is divided into four parts, each dedicated to

one of the elements. The council of Druids that rules over these lands is worried – one of their number has gone missing, and no-one knows what's happened to him. They call on you to find their missing brother and bring him back.

The game is played from an isometric 3D view and you control your character with the mouse. Everything is lovingly detailed in high-resolution SVGA graphics, and the interface is simple to pick up. Beyond these basics, though, things start to break down a little.

Druid is one of those frustrating games that just doesn't quite manage to work. It's full of good ideas – and a real effort has been made to make the game system as unobtrusive as possible, allowing you to concentrate on the story. Unfortunately, the various elements don't

really seem to fit together very well, and the game has a somewhat disjointed feel to it. Combine this with an awkward combat system that requires split-second timing, and you end up with something of a poor man's *Ultima VIII* (a game which *Druid* resembles in many ways).

Andy Butcher **Score 5/10**

Living Legends

A scenario for MechWarrior

£6.95 FASA Corp

001 312 243 5660 Out now

Here we have the latest addition to the long line of scenarios set against the epic background of the Succession Wars and, subsequently, the Clan Invasion of the Inner Sphere. Once again, FASA have produced an extremely versatile scenario and sourcebook, providing vast opportunities for excellent role-playing; and also the chance of some furious action against the forces of Clan Smoke Jaguar.

The basic mission on which the characters are sent is a surveillance operation. However, during the operation, the arrival of an unidentified vessel in the system plunges the group into a desperate game of diplomacy, intrigue and espionage, in a bid to maintain the already precarious balance of power between the Inner Sphere and the Clans. Players will soon realise that this mission rapidly takes on a whole new importance.

It is great to see that the temptation to turn this scenario into a bullet-fest was avoided. Instead, it's a tightly scripted and ingenious situation: a real crisis for the characters to cope with. Action scenes do exist, though, and are challenging and exciting, involving not only BattleMech combat but also an extremely risky commando raid – I'll say no more…

The source material is of an equally high standard, covering space operations, zero-G combat and other related topics. Additionally, the maps and deck-plans are clearly marked and detailed. Add in a strong cast of NPCs, and it makes for a perfect scenario. As a bonus, it offers interesting suggestions for further scenarios using some of the same NPCs.

All in all this is a brilliant supplement – one which any *MechWarrior* referee should consider as an addition to his collection, especially if his players get a little too cocky about their abilities. Let them see how good they *really* are.

Alex Bund **Score 8/10**

Stonekeep

A roleplaying game for the PC

£44.99 Interplay 01235 821666 486DX, CD-ROM and 4MB RAM Out now

After a worrying delay, Interplay's roleplaying tour de force is finally here. But was it worth the wait?

As a general rule, the longer a computer game is delayed past its original release date, the worse the game will end up being when it does finally turn up. Considering that *Stonekeep* was originally due to be released several years ago, you won't be surprised to learn that I was viewing its eventual arrival with a fair degree of scepticism.

But so much for 'as a general rule'. *Stonekeep* might not revolutionise computer roleplaying, but it *is* rather a good game. Perhaps not quite good enough to justify the extra years of development, but certainly not disappointing.

The game casts you as Drake, a fairly typical heroic type – tall, lean, rugged, and more than willing to throw himself into insanely dangerous situations for the most inconsequential reasons. Drake was little more than a baby when his home, the impregnable fortress of Stonekeep, was attacked by evil sorcery and sunk below the earth. There's nothing like a traumatic childhood to send someone a bit bonkers, so as the game begins, Drake returns to the site of the once-mighty castle with the intention of freeing it from the evil that still inhabits it. On his own, of course.

The sewers under the Castle itself are packed full of these annoying wormy things. What do they eat when there aren't any heroes around, anyway?

Once you actually get into the castle, you see your surroundings from the familiar first-person perspective. Drake moves in 'steps', each representing a square on the map; but the progression from square to square is animated, giving the impression of smooth movement. The entire game is played from this one screen – a 'magic mirror' and inventory scroll pop up on the right to enable you to manipulate items, while your statistics, notes and automap are contained in a journal that opens from the left. Control is via a mix of mouse and keyboard commands, and is very simple and intuitive.

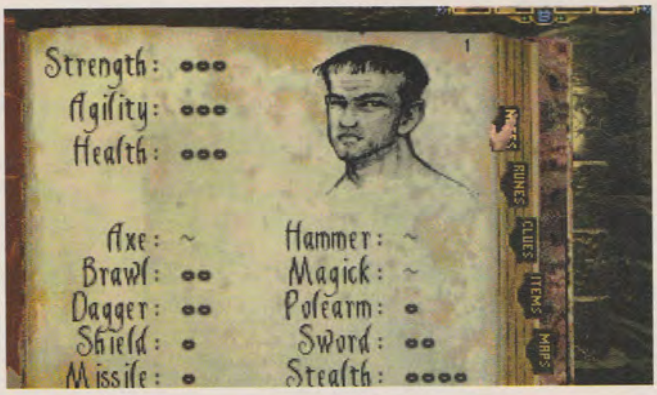
Although Drake begins his quest alone, he eventually meets other characters who may join him. During combat these party members fight automatically, but otherwise leave everything pretty much up to you.

Although the 'plot' as such is somewhat weak, and the game quickly falls into an 'explore the level, kill the monsters, solve the puzzles' affair, *Stonekeep* is engaging and surprisingly addictive. The graphics are nearly all based on digitised video – even the passageways of the castle itself – which helps to create an effective atmosphere. Combined with the intuitive control system and well-paced increase in difficulty, this results in a compelling dungeon bash that's very enjoyable.

But, at the end of the day, it is still a dungeon bash.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10



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Armed & Dangerous

An expansion set for RoboRally
£22.50 Wizards of the Coast
0345 125599 Out now

Hot on the heels of the second edition of *RoboRally* comes the first (and given the changes at Wizards of the Coast – see *Despatches* – possibly the only) expansion for Richard Garfield's robot racing game. The set is made up of six new factory-floor board sections and 26 new option cards, as well as a sheet of new counters, a short rule book and some quick-reference cards.

The board sections introduce a number of new features and hazards, including different levels, water-filled areas, randomisers and teleporters, all of which function in a logical and easy-to-understand manner.

The option cards are the heart of the set, though, and add a number of new rules, including explosive damage, flying robots and ammunition. The accompanying rule book explains each card clearly, and suggests some... erm... 'optional' rules to increase the frequency with which options are used in the game.

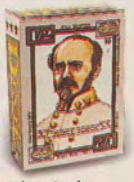
Armed & Dangerous certainly succeeds in adding a whole new level of mayhem and madness to *RoboRally*. The question, though, is whether or not the game actually needs it. One of the beauties of *RoboRally* is the elegant simplicity of the rules, and the speed with which they can be learnt. *Armed & Dangerous* may make things more interesting, but at the cost of a significant increase in complexity.

This is not for those people who enjoy the odd race every now and then, but for dedicated players only.

Andy Butcher **Score 6/10**

Dixie

1st Bull Run Edition
Columbia Games
Available in the UK from Esdevium Games
01252 311443



Dixie is a collectable card game for two players set in the American Civil War. Each deck has sixty cards equally split into two groups of thirty. One is the Confederate side and the other is the Yankees. There are three basic kinds of cards in each group; troop cards (infantry, cavalry or artillery), which are the basic units pitted against each other; General cards, which add bonuses to your troops' morale; and special cards that →

A SLA Industries supplement

Mort Sourcebook

£14.99 Wizards of the Coast/Nightfall Games 0345 125599 Out now

The largest city in the world of progress has some of its secrets revealed at last...

As the site of SLA Industries' HQ, the vast urban nightmare of Mort is the logical setting for most *SLA* campaigns. Unfortunately, the basic rule book's 'style over substance' approach gives very little hard information about the city beyond vague impressions and an abundance of atmosphere.

The *Mort Sourcebook* is an attempt to flesh out the rich potential of this setting. It offers a guide both to the city and to many of its most important and interesting features, as well as a selection of contracts (BPNs) set within the city boundaries and suitable for almost any squad of Operatives.

The book begins with a broad overview of the city and its geography. Mort is split into several discrete sections, forming a series of rings. In the very centre is the aptly named Central, home of SLA Industries and Mr Slayer himself. As you travel further from the middle, though, the neighbourhoods begin to decline, until you reach the crime-plagued streets of Downtown, the setting for most BPN missions.

Surrounding the city itself are the ruined Cannibal Sectors; breeding places for monsters both human and otherwise. Each area is described in general terms, along with any famous (or infamous) areas located there. The book then proceeds to deal with certain aspects of the city in greater detail, and this is where the problems begin.

After only 20 pages of information about the city itself, the book dives almost immediately into an exhaustive description of the Pit, the biggest nightclub in the world, which is dedicated entirely to Operatives. While it's a neat idea, and quite interesting, do you really need 22 pages about a place where players will mainly go simply to relax? Likewise, a little further in, 28 pages are dedicated to describing Mort's police force, the Shivers. Once again, this is very well done, but doesn't actually tell you that much about the city.

As with everything released for *SLA Industries*, the *Mort Sourcebook* is packed with superb artwork.

And that's the real problem with the *Mort Sourcebook*. Although it's beautifully designed, well laid out, easy to read and full of some interesting (and some vital) information – in short, a great step forward for *SLA Industries* – very little of its material is directly related to the city itself. Once again, style and atmosphere have won out over solid facts and useful information.

Having said that, the book does offer a far more coherent and inspiring atmosphere than many of the previous *SLA* releases, and much of the information here will prove very useful to referees – the details of Shiver units and equipment alone make it almost worthwhile (even though the whole section should have been in the basic rules). There's even an index and glossary.

As a guide to Mort itself, then, the *Mort Sourcebook* is somewhat less than impressive. It will, however, prove very useful to almost any *SLA* referee, both in terms of inspiration and actual usable information. You just can't help thinking that much of this should have been in the basic rules, leaving more space here for the city...

Andy Butcher

Score 6/10

A boxed set for Warhammer Fantasy Battle

Chronicles Of War

£14.99 Games Workshop 01773 713213 Out Now

games workshop have released another supplement for warhammer... resistance is useless.

Chronicles of War is a boxed set consisting of three colour mediaeval-type buildings, 18 new magic items and a hefty compilation of *Warhammer* articles culled from *White Dwarf*.

The *Warhammer* articles are pretty much the best of what has appeared over the last two years, consisting of tactics features, battle reports and suggestions for running a narrative campaign. For a novice who has played a few games and decided, "Yes, this will cure my urges to conquer and despoil all I see," these articles will prove inspirational.

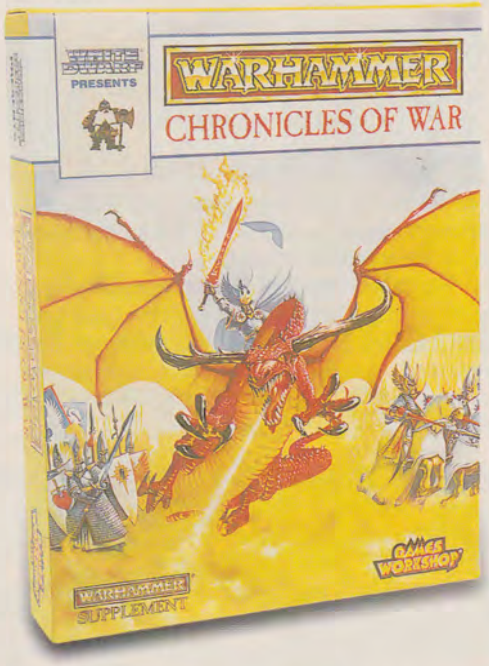
Battle reports are always rollicking good fun as they encapsulate the spirit of the armies involved and help players visualise their own battles in more colourful terms. After reading a report, you don't so much roll a die as kebab three goblins on the end of your lance.

The tactics articles are aimed at developing a player's awareness of their army's possibilities, and spurring Generals to develop their own dastardly plans. Further, they clarify the murkier rules, infamous for the twisted interpretations they spawn.

The narrative campaign concept is also useful, as it demonstrates how players can think a little more laterally about their games. The ideas are fairly obvious hooks on which to hang an encounter, but they provide a good link between battles and the *Warhammer* source material. Being relatively painless to run, these links can neatly alleviate the 'futility of war' syndrome players sometimes feel after chucking their entire army on the table and watching it being slaughtered for four turns.

But now is not the time to stare into the abject abyss of nothingness, for now is a time of crisis. Because demon *Warhammer* players will probably have swallowed all these *White Dwarf* offerings already. Thus, unless their back issues have been claimed by Chaos, the *Chronicles of War* set is irrelevant. So you've gotta ask yourself just one question – do you feel that three buildings and eighteen magic items are worth £14.99?

On the magic item front, there are some rather nifty wee widgets here. For example, there are seven anti-magic items that deflect, reflect or otherwise swallow spells. There is the Lifestone of Ashraaz, which sneakily swaps your wounds



characteristic with the enemy character who has just dished you out a near-fatal beating. There is the Chalice of Fate, with which you can re-roll the winds of magic once per game. But the majority of these items, though intriguing, are small beer – you're not going to get blown off the field without them.

The buildings, though, are quite excellent – the best quality of their type I've seen. Some construction is required, but never fear. Normally I'm a bit of a hopeless duffer when it comes to this sort of thing, liable to end up in casualty with the whole edifice superglued to my face and carrying my severed fingers in a bag of frozen peas; however, with due care and attention even my buildings largely resembled the ones on the box. And, incidentally, looked superb on the battlefield.

Overall then, *Chronicles of War* is a useful and mildly entertaining accessory, but it's far from what you'd call compulsory.

Mark Donald

Score 6/10

influence the play in a particular way. It makes for a surprisingly enjoyable recreation of the intense and violent action of the Civil War. From a very simple card layout, some quite intricate tactics can be used. Artillery fire reveals units in hiding on the opposing side. Ill-considered infantry and cavalry charges occur; retreats and rallies are all handled comfortably. The influence of a good General can make all the difference. And just when you think you know which way the battle's going, the judicious use of a special card allowing you to bring in extra reserves or outflank an opponent can tilt the balance back.

The cards themselves are good, sporting reasonable line drawings (with authentic uniforms, natch) on well-laminated thick card. The only problem with them is that once bent, they tend to stay that way.

So it's a fun game that offers many an hour of pleasant (if perhaps only mildly exciting) entertainment. The game can be played straight from the starter deck and added to at your leisure, which is a good thing. On the other hand, it doesn't really offer the huge variety of options that a game such as *Magic: The Gathering* does.

Steve Faragher Score 7/10

Pages from the Mages

A supplement for the AD&D Forgotten Realms campaign

£9.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

This soft-bound volume from TSR heralds the latest influx of incantations for the *Forgotten Realms* campaign. There's no reason why, in most cases, you can't adapt the new spells it provides to suit your own campaign, but much of the background material – and in many cases this is the best stuff – will of course have to be changed.

The general format consists of describing a number of spell books currently in existence in the campaign. Brief histories of each are given, along with the backgrounds behind their creators and hints as to where the books may now be found. If you needed further convincing that the life of a wizard is a dangerous one, liable to be terminated quickly and violently, then you'll find it here.

Naturally, tracking down one of these spell books should involve a fair amount of adventuring by the players. While most books also contain common spells, the spells actually detailed are for the most

part unique, and many bear their inventors' names. A character casting such a spell is bound to create a stir, because many of these tomes have been highly sought-after and contested for some time.

Some spells are more useful than others (Quimby's Enchanting Gourmet!?) and some can most kindly be described as space-fillers. In addition, you get a few priest spells; instructions for creating a handful of magical items; and details of new monsters. Not as inspiring as most releases, *Pages from the Mages* can only be recommended to those who've thoroughly exhausted the existing spell lists.

Cliff Ramshaw Score 6/10

The Crow

A collectable card game
15 card Masterpack £1.99
Heartbreaker 001 610 626 2259
(in the UK call Gamecraft
0151 207 3737) Out now

Considering the success of the movie and the current flood of licensed collectable card games, it was almost inevitable that Brandon Lee's last film would be transferred to cardboard.

What wasn't inevitable was that it would actually be quite good. *The Crow* is basically a combat game, where your characters – classed as Angels, Devils or Bystanders – try to defeat those of your opponent. Each character has an Attack and Defence value, and combat is resolved by comparing the numbers, along with any bonuses or penalties, from various special cards. Each card is worth a certain number of Virtue points, and bringing it into play requires you to discard an equal number of Virtue points' worth of cards from your hand. A card's Virtue also equals the number of Vengeance points you receive for killing it in combat, and the first player to get 25 Vengeance points wins.

The cards themselves are adequate rather than superb, nearly all featuring a still from the movie. There are several different Crow cards, each representing Eric Draven in a different state of mind. A player can only have one Crow card in play at any time, and the card cannot be killed in combat – 'death' results in it being shuffled back into your deck.

The Crow is a simple game that would serve as a good introduction to CCGs. There's just enough depth to give it some skill, and the game mechanics are elegant. Experienced players may find it limiting and lacking in lasting appeal.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

A fantasy strategy game for the PC

Warcraft 2: Tides Of Darkness

£44.95 Zablac/Blizzard Entertainment 01626 332233 Out now

The great war between orcs and humans isn't over yet — and this time they've brought their friends...

The story of the great war between the orcs and humans of Azeroth continues. Driven from their homelands by rampaging orc clans, the humans have fled to the continent of Lordaeron, where they find new allies. Unfortunately, so do the orcs.

Like its predecessor, *Warcraft 2* is a real-time strategy game that casts you as a commander of either the orc or human armies and presents you with a series of missions to complete.

Each mission takes place on a battlefield that is seen from a slightly isometric overhead view, showing the various units, buildings, and terrain. Your forces are made up of units (such as Knights, Elven Archers and so on) and buildings. Each building has a specific purpose; and by harvesting enough gold, lumber and oil you can build new ones to expand the range of units and weapons available to you.

As with most games of this type, areas that you haven't yet explored are blacked out. Slightly more interesting is the addition of a 'fog of war' effect – areas that are currently out of your units' line of site are shaded, so that you can see the terrain, but not any enemies who may be lurking there.

Warcraft 2 is controlled by a simple mouse interface, with keyboard shortcuts for most tasks. To give a unit an order, you simply select it; click on the right order icon; and then click on a target. The process is sped up considerably by the ability to select more than one unit at a time, and by using

the right button to issue 'auto orders'. Selecting a unit and then right-clicking on a target will give it the obvious order – if the target is an enemy, your unit will attack, and so on.

In many ways, then, *Warcraft 2 is* very similar to the original game – which is no bad thing, considering how good it was. The main differences are the 'fog of war', SVGA graphics, new units, and more complex missions.

The game is not without problems, though; the main one being the computer opponent, which isn't particularly challenging and mostly takes a passive role. The new units are also slightly disappointing – although there's a wide range on offer, most are too specialised for general use, and you find yourself relying on a few basic types. Finally, although the SVGA graphics are very nice, they would have been better used to show more of the battlefield.

Still, *Warcraft 2* is a great game. Despite its limitations, it's challenging, fun, easy to get into, and very addictive. The ability to play either side means that there are a vast number of missions on offer, and a level designer gives yet more longevity.

Where *Warcraft 2* really shines, though, is in multiplayer mode. The game supports from two to eight players via every possible method of link-up; once you start playing, it's impossible to stop.

Andy Butcher

Score 8/10

→

A supplement for Traveller: The New Era

Regency Combat Vehicle Guide

Regency Manual 2

£6.99 GDW 001 309 452 3632 Out now

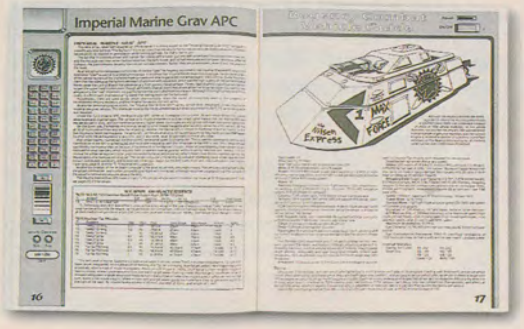
Full game statistics and notes for many of the most deadly military vehicles ever made. But are they really needed?

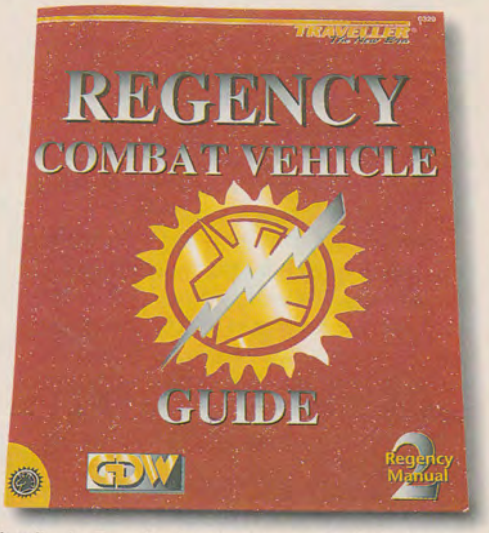
As the last remnant of the once-mighty Imperium, the Regency has managed to preserve much of the vast empire's technology and culture, specifically its military forces, making the area one of the most formidable in the universe of *The New Era*.

The recent release of *Striker II* included game statistics for nearly all of the Imperium's key military vehicles, many of which are still in service in 'The Marches'. The *Regency Combat Vehicle Guide* expands on these, giving full Fire, Fusion and Steel designs of the vehicles that form the Regency's 'Thunderbolt' – the 'Sword' of the Regency Marines and the 'Shield' of the Regency Army.

The book begins with a brief introduction, including general design notes and a broad discussion of the Regency's military organisation and standardised weapons. Then it's straight into the vehicle descriptions.

There are 32 of these, all grav vehicles and all TL14 or 15. The Regency is attempting to update all forces to TL15, but as it stands, the Marines have the bulk of the TL15 gear, with the Army still dependant on TL14 equipment. Each vehicle description begins with a brief discussion of the design, its main uses and any particular strengths or weaknesses, followed by complete game statistics in standard format. Included are the Trepida Grav Tank, the smoothly rounded bulk of which has been





familiar in *Traveller* for many years, the infamous Imperial Marine Grav APC, and other horrors of the battlefield, including the Imperial Meson Artillery Vehicle, with its effective range of 30,600km!

As with so many *Traveller* releases, the attention to detail is overwhelming. Many of the designs have flaws or peculiarities that increase the sense of realism, and the captions to the many illustrations read like those in military magazines.

Unfortunately, unless you're a real *Traveller* military buff or your group is actively involved in the Regency military, you're hardly ever going to need these designs. Any game where weapons of this power popped up all the time would quickly become unmanageable. It's a shame, because it's obvious that a lot of thought and effort has gone into it, but the *Regency Combat Vehicle Guide* will be of very limited use to most campaigns.

Andy Butcher

Score 5/10

Sky Point Adventures

A scenario supplement for Earthdawn

£10.99 FASA Corp

001 312 243 5660 Out now

Following the release of the *Sky Point & Vivane* boxed set (**arcane** 1), comes this collection of three adventures set in and around the Theran controlled city. Each has been written for a group of six or so adventurers, but with different recommended Circles.

Chasing The Snakeskin Boots is a short scenario designed for 2nd or 3rd Circle characters, who are hired to recover some stolen property. It's a simple, linear story, consisting of little more than a linked series of encounters that can be finished in a single session quite easily. Despite its obvious limitations, though, it could well lead to much more interesting stories.

A Message To Vivane is slightly more complex in scope, and gives 3rd Circle characters a good reason to travel from Barsaive to the Theran city. It's a good deal less linear than *Chasing The Snakeskin Boots*, and some degree of thought and diplomacy will be required for players to reach the end of this story with their characters' hides intact.

Finally, *Shadows* will give 3rd or 4th Circle characters a first hand taste of life in Vrontok, the seedy shanty town that's sprung up at the foot of Sky Point, and revolves around an interesting new critter and a nefarious plot. It's perhaps the most interesting of the adventures in the book, but still suffers from being a little too rigid in its plotting.

In all, *Sky Point Adventures* is a fairly even mix of good and bad. There are some great adventure ideas here, but to do them justice will require a fair amount of work from the referee.

Andy Butcher Score 5/10

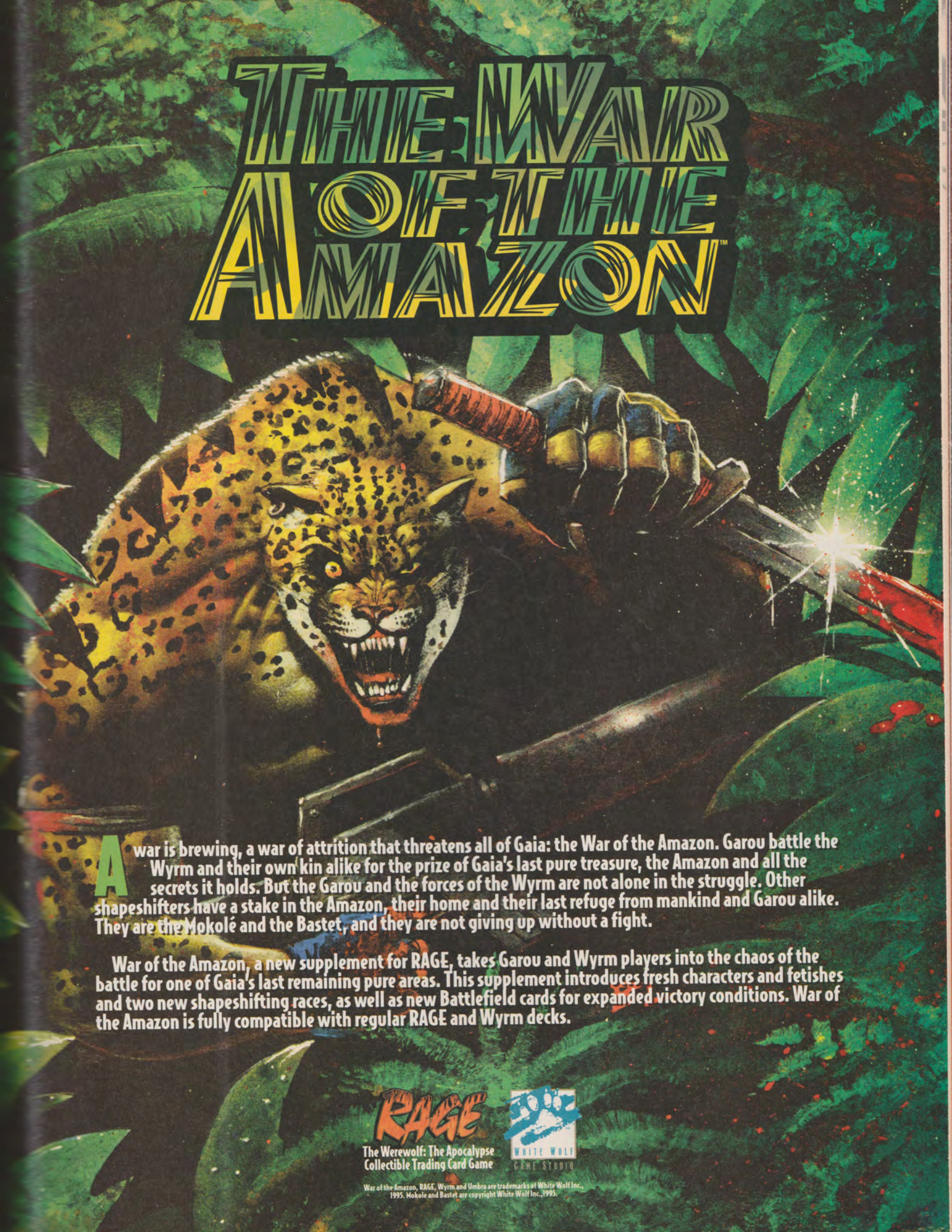
City Designer

An expansion disk for Campaign Cartographer

£24.95 ProFantasy Software

0171 237 0027 Requires Campaign Cartographer 1.2 Out now

Campaign Cartographer (reviewed **arcane** 1) was aimed mainly at creating large scale maps of countries and worlds. *Dungeon Designer* (also reviewed in **arcane** 1) expanded the program, adding features that made laying out dungeons and building floorplans much simpler. *City Designer*, the latest expansion from ProFantasy Software, aims to do much the



A war is brewing, a war of attrition that threatens all of Gaia: the War of the Amazon. Garou battle the Wyrm and their own kin alike for the prize of Gaia's last pure treasure, the Amazon and all the secrets it holds. But the Garou and the forces of the Wyrm are not alone in the struggle. Other shapeshifters have a stake in the Amazon, their home and their last refuge from mankind and Garou alike. They are the Mokolé and the Bastet, and they are not giving up without a fight.

War of the Amazon, a new supplement for RAGE, takes Garou and Wyrm players into the chaos of the battle for one of Gaia's last remaining pure areas. This supplement introduces fresh characters and fetishes and two new shapeshifting races, as well as new Battlefield cards for expanded victory conditions. War of the Amazon is fully compatible with regular RAGE and Wyrm decks.

RAGE

The Werewolf: The Apocalypse Collectible Trading Card Game

WHITE WOLF GAME STUDIO

War of the Amazon, RAGE, Wyrm and Umbra are trademarks of White Wolf Inc., 1995. Mokole and Bastet are copyright White Wolf Inc., 1995.

A generic fantasy roleplaying supplement

Central Casting:

Heroes Of Legend 2nd Edition

£12.99 Task Force Games 001 806 372 1266 Out now

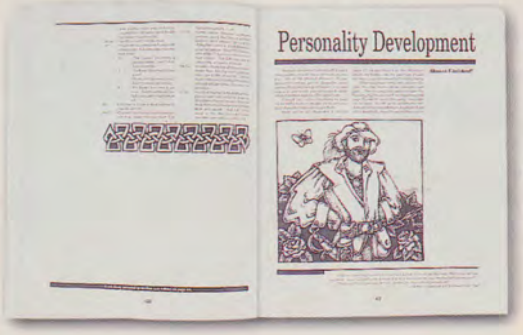
Childhood history generation system and tabloid exclusive generator. Heroes of Legend is both!

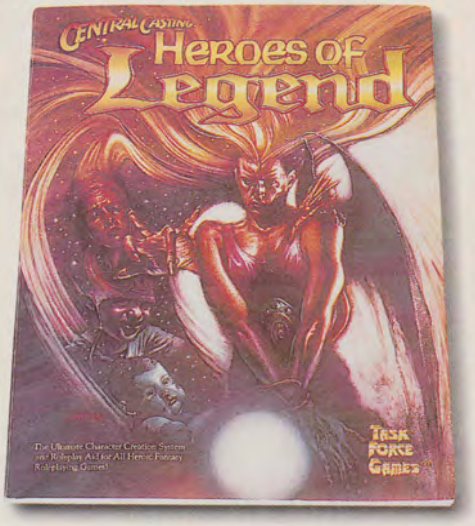
Astrology in reverse is the only way to describe *Heroes Of Legend*. Working with your recently generated characters, runes are cast (well, a horde of dice actually) not to see what they'll do in the future, but to find out what they did in the past.

Starting with heritage and origins, the tables lead you through significant events of childhood and adolescence, reveal the hobbies and interests of youth and describe friends, relatives and all manner of miscellany that go to make up a 'fully rounded personality'. You know, the sort exhibited by the residents of Ramsey Street or Albert Square.

In testing the tables, an off-the-shelf *D&D* rogue Surfz gained a history that would have a *Brookside* scriptwriter running for cover. Poor little Surfz was born into poverty and quickly acquired a curse that insisted two traumatic events happen in quick succession. After wading to the tragedies table, it transpires that the curse manifested itself in the form of outlaw status for BOTH his parents; his father for selling stolen goods and his mother for matricide. Which spookily agreed with the first roll fact that he was raised by his aunt!

These events were generated with strict adherence to *Heroes Of Legend* rules and do illustrate the elegant open endedness of the system, which attempts to reconcile as many strikingly different themes and events as possible. The result is a patchwork of facts that any roleplayer can quickly stitch into a colourful – if not always plausible – history. *Heroes Of Legend* aims to create over-the-top lives, and it works.





Heroes Of Legend's weakest point is the ceaseless cross-referencing, as events regularly need further clarification on yet more tables buried deeper in the book. The intro claims it may take as much as 30 minutes to create a history, but Surfz childhood took me 2 hours, and I stopped when he was still only 17!

Most players prefer to conjure their own histories, despite the obvious lack of colour and cliché traps. So *Heroes Of Legend* will prove most useful for GMs who need to create a range of convincing NPCs. Here the tables can quickly give them backgrounds that disguise their actual game purpose, distracting the players with anecdotes about what they did when they were a lad.

Heroes Of Legend fleshes out characters and offers those odd foibles that make roleplaying rewarding – a dragon shaped birthmark on the buttocks anybody? The trick, if players will use the system, will be keeping player histories in check as the personality traits thrown up could easily overwhelm less skilful players.

Trenton Webb

Score 7/10

same for the mapping of, well, cities.

With this goal in mind, *City Designer* adds a whole new range of features to the basic *Campaign Cartographer* program. To start with there are over 150 new pre-designed symbols, ranging from ancient to futuristic building types, including the always handy 'rubble'. In addition there are 24 new pre-defined 'layers' (different 'levels' on the map that allow you to, for example, only display roads, or print different versions of a map – one for the referee and one for the players).

As with *Dungeon Designer*, *City Designer* doesn't really let you create maps that you couldn't do with *Campaign Cartographer* alone, but it does make the whole process far simpler, quicker, and more convenient.

Where *City Designer* does come into its own is if you have the ability to referee a game with your PC to hand. There are a whole range of new and expanded commands that allow you to quickly move around the maps you create, find specific buildings or streets, even link encounter tables and other information to given areas.

If you're lucky enough to be in this situation, then *City Designer* is very handy indeed. On the other hand, if all you want to do is create maps to print out, *Dungeon Designer* is far more useful overall.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

Mekton Zeta Tactical Display

A supplement for Mekton Zeta

£5.99 R Talsorian

001 510 549 1373 Out now

Despite the fancy title, what this really consists of is a referee's screen for R Talsorian's anime-inspired game of 'big robots' kicking each other about. In addition to the screen itself, there's also a 32 page supplement, covering various subjects.

Referee's screens are one of those traditional roleplaying accessories that every game company seems to feel obliged to produce. Just why this should be so remains unclear, especially considering that very few are actually of any great use. As with character sheets, most players end up creating their own.

That said, this one isn't too bad. At the very least it's logically designed, moving step by step through the combat process from left to right on the referee's side. Sadly, the side facing the players has

only one panel of information, containing all the various damage tables, with the other two panels taken up by a pleasant (if useless) piece of artwork. The supplement booklet includes a mish-mash of articles, including new rules, equipment, adventure ideas, play hints and an errata for *Mekton Zeta Plus*.

Overall, then, this is something of a mixed package. Most referees will still be able to create a more useful screen themselves, but (provided you own *Mekton Zeta Plus*), the supplement book can come in very handy.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

The Guilded Lilly

An adventure for Traveller: The New Era
£6.99 GDW 001 309 452 3632
Out now

Intended as the first of a three part campaign, *The Virus Redux Epic, The Guilded Lilly* is an adventure for a group of characters allied with the Reformation Coalition. The RCES's Long Range Operations Group has decided that the planet Berens and its still operational Starport would be of great usefulness in the planned expansion throughout the Diaspora Sector, and sends the team there to open 'informal relations' with the planet's small population.

Unfortunately, the Mercantile Guild also has plans for Berens, so things aren't going to be as simple as they seem. While the Guild is unlikely to take any violent action against RCES personel, neither will it let the players have their own way.

Only when the players reach Berens does the true nature of the story become apparent, though. On the planet the team find something truly amazing – The Lilly Marlene. Apparently a normal Far Trader, only closer inspection reveals that the ship is in fact brand new. Someone or something is making new starships.

Although recent events at GDW mean that the next two parts of the adventure may never see the light of day, *The Guilded Lilly* contains more than enough background information to inspire a campaign on its own. The central premise is intriguing and original, and the adventure serves as a perfect follow up to those detailed in the Vampire Fleets book. Any *Traveller: TNE* referee with a Reformation Coalition campaign is strongly recommended to take a look.

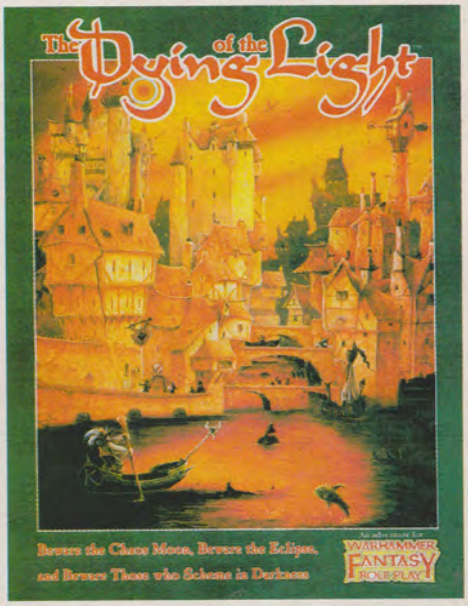
Andy Butcher Score 7/10

A new adventure for WFRP

The Dying of the Light

£10.99 Hogshead Publishing 0181 673 6340 Out now

The first of Hogshead publishing's new releases for warhammer fantasy roleplay has arrived. was it worth the wait?


The Dying of the Light
Beware the Chaos Moon, Beware the Eclipse,
and Beware Those who Scheme in Darkness
WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY

At last, a new adventure for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*. For the first time in years, referees can finally give their creative cells a well-earned rest and leave the work to someone else. *The Dying of the Light* sets characters on a mundane trek to Marienburg in order to collect a book for their benefactor's studies, then throws them headlong into the fear that surrounds the oncoming eclipse by Morrslieb – the Chaos moon. Their contact and associates then compel the PCs to undertake a quest through the sinister Wastelands in order to thwart the reincarnation of a demon prince and the port's destruction.

Not exactly an original concept, but then this is Hogshead Publishing's first foray into the *WFRP* world under their own steam and so one would expect them to keep to relatively safe paths. This said, *Dying of the Light* is an excellent adventure. The establishment of the basic plot makes the initial chapter slightly laborious, but from there the quest launches into collapsing dwarven dams, ravenous bog octopuses and an undead city, all before the PCs have even reached their prize.

This is a well-planned adventure, which takes into account PC actions and offers various possibilities to put them back onto the right track. Likewise, the presentation is first rate, with artwork that is not only in keeping with the dark atmosphere of *WFRP* but also of an excellent standard, giving a quality finish to the package.

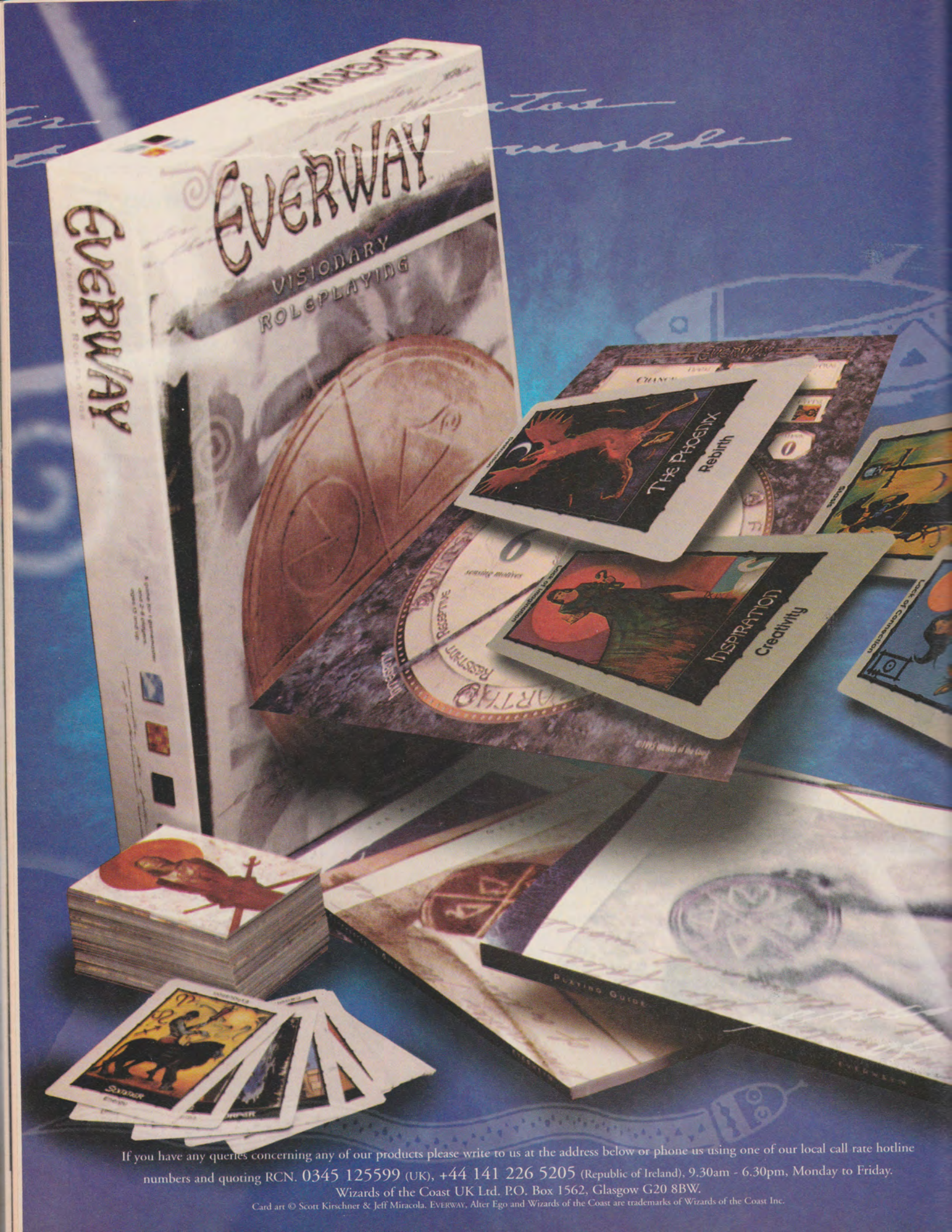
There's something here for everyone – the more bloodthirsty players will find enough hack'n'slash encounters to keep them happy and devious referees will delight at the various awkward situations where diplomacy and thoughtful roleplaying is the only way to save the characters' heads. Perhaps most impressive is the sense of urgency imparted by the steady advance of the eclipse. Time continues to tick away while the plot seeks to hold characters up at every turn, creating a fantastic sprint to Marienburg for a dramatic climax.

There are a few weak areas, though. The encountered warpstone is really too impotent, for a start. Characters who find themselves in the same room as a giant chunk of the raw stuff of chaos should at least sprout a chaos attribute or two, creating a good reason to stay at the mutant colony and aid their plight. And despite the multitude of maps in the book, the exact layout of the hidden library is missing. As a guide is needed to the various caves and tunnels, especially when the odds are stacked so highly against the PCs survival, this is a significant oversight.

The only other problems that might arise are due to the complex nature of the story. Referees will have to be thoroughly familiar with the whole adventure before they begin, but if played in two-to-three chapter sections, modifications to later encounters can be made without much difficulty. *The Dying of the Light* is a fine offering from Hogshead Publishing. It might not break any new ground, but this adventure does offer hours of intense roleplaying.

David Cornford.

Score 8/10



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Hot Metal

More developments in the strange, shrunken world of fantasy miniatures – Karen Newis is your guide

Gardes Grenadiers (for Flintloque)

So the French are elves, eh? This game seems to be going for the prize for The Greatest Alienation of Nations. Maybe the idea is that all elves are French. Who knows? Still, these fellers (who are, indidentally, 48mm and 50mm high) get great big hats to wear, the scupltng is fairly good and the casting is competent... it's just a shame that the figures have been given grapefruit-knife-style swords. Handy if they're camping in an orchard, no doubt. Now that I think about it, I've seen those faces somewhere before, too, but that's okay – I like them as much now as I did before.

Alternative Armies

01159 287809

around £3.95 for four

Unicorn

It's a staple of any self-respecting miniatures collection, the Unicorn, but this example (45mm nose to tail, number 1069 from Grim Reaper Casting) is... well... frankly, rather grim. Now I like Unicorns with goatee beards, so no problems there: but reptilian eyes and a greyhound's torso? That's pushing your luck just a little too far. If it weren't for the mane, tail and horn the darn thing would be completely unrecognisable. It's just not good enough. Don't waste your cash on this one, unless you plan to have a plague that causes deformity afflicting all the innocent creatures in your game world.

Grim Reaper, USA

001 212 626 8031

SRP £1.75

Corp Guard Team

From the 'Future Warriors' range by Grenadier, the Corp Guard Team (1541, 30mm high) consists of just the two fairly standard soldier types. Not excessively individual, these guys will fit into any present-day or future setting. They are reasonably well designed with believable accessories, but the flash might just drive you mad – it did me. I would guess that designer Copplestone didn't enjoy doing these – the little quirks that make his work so good are missing entirely.

Grenadier Models – available from Hobbygames *01903 730998* around £2.95 for two

Dwarfs: Dragon Slayers

As a fun piece, an example of exaggeration, it's great – enormous mohican and ludicrous axe, not to mention the intricate woven beard. (He's 32mm tall.) His eyes are so deeply sunk that painting might be tricky. Casting is a bit rough, and the price is a bit steep.

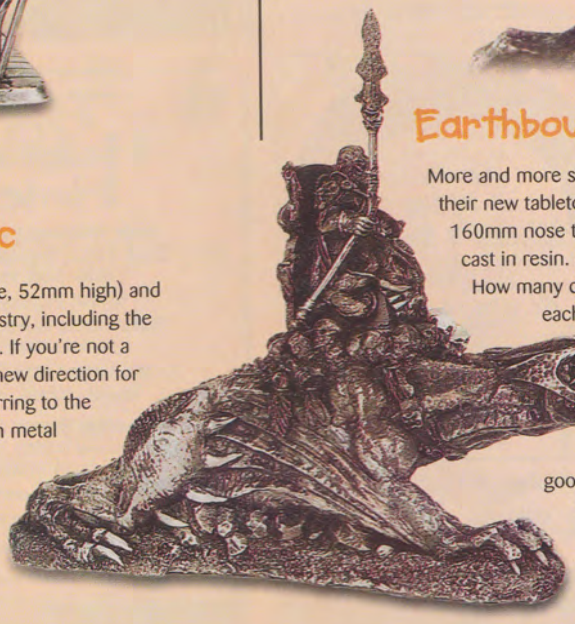
Games Workshop Mail Order *01773 713213*

£3.99

Saruman and Gandalf at the tower of Orthanc

Another Mithril diorama (number MV360, 62mm wide, 52mm high) and another beautiful representation of Tolkien's rich tapestry, including the dinkiest little globe you ever saw. Gorgeous, I tell you. If you're not a Tolkien fan, you are going to miss out on a fine, fine new direction for Mithril. Marvel as you find assembly a breeze by referring to the picture. Drool as your brush glides across the smooth metal with – wait for it – no discernable mould lines.

Mithril Miniatures, Ireland
00353 26 40222
SRP £5.99 for the set



Earthbound Dragon

More and more stuff rolls off the production line at Grendel for their new tabletop skirmish game. Earthbound Dragon (20010, 160mm nose to tail) is another example of lavish detail cleanly cast in resin. Assembly is a little tough, but not impossible. How many companies do you know who bother to sculpt each skull separately? Or indeed bother to decorate the back of the chair? Precisely. Lightweight, robust, clean sharp detail and interesting designs: good stuff, I'm sure you'll agree. Just remember to wash the mould grease off before you paint.

Grendel *0131 554 5540*
around £5.99

Domur

Julie Guthrie is still working on those personality figures we know so well. They're not about to set the world alight for originality, but they still make a damn good place to start a figure collection. Domur (02007, 36mm high) shows us that the old hands in the sculpting game haven't forgotten that we punters love a bit of intricacy. A well-designed, archetypal wizard and – gasp! – well cast too. This one stays in my collection.

Reaper Miniatures, USA
001 214 434 3088
around £1.95

Ogre with Mace

Where would we be without mace-wielding ogres? Probably playing *Vampire*. But for those of us still upholding the origins of the hobby, this one is... erm... large and chunky. Well, it's not bad – some real work has been put in to get the mail shirt and rope bindings right. Tim Prow has given him the kind of face only a mother could love, as is only fitting. The casting is mostly good, with only a few parting lines visible. And Ogre with Mace (3603, 50mm high) is pretty good value even if all you consider is the sheer weight of metal in it.

Heartbreaker – available from Gamecraft *0151 207 3737*
SRP £1.50

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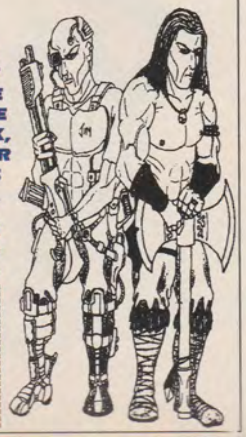

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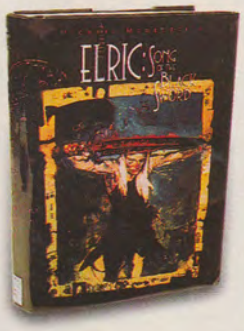
The Great Library

In which we review all the latest book releases and recommend the ones that are worth buying...

Elric: Song of the Black Sword

by Michael Moorcock Published by White Wolf
Hardback US$19.99 Out now



Michael Moorcock's writing presents one substantial problem for new readers: the phenomenal rate at which he churns out novels. The sheer number of books he has written can be off-putting, especially to a newcomer who doesn't know where to start. Luckily, some bright spark at White Wolf has realised this, and they've started re-printing Moorcock's work in collected volumes.

Song Of The Black Sword is the fifth volume of the collected *Eternal Champion* series, and is the first to deal with the hero's most famous incarnation as Elric, Prince of Melnibone.

"Stormbringer rose in Elric's gloved hand, its black metal catching the rays of the glaring sun"

Included here are the first six Elric stories – *Elric Of Melnibone, The Fortress Of The Pearl, The Sailor On The Seas Of Fate, The Dreaming City, While The Gods Laugh* and *The Singing Citadel.* Typically enough for Moorcock, this is not the order in which they were originally written, but the order in which they occur in Elric's life. A bit of editing and rewriting has been done to ensure continuity.

If you have any interest at all in fantasy literature, this volume is as much required reading as Tolkien's *Lord Of The Rings.* Moorcock's work has been at least as influential, and Elric in particular is one of the best-known characters in the genre. Moorcock's writing style may not be the best, but these are classic stories, and are just as fresh and imaginative today as they ever were.

Andy Butcher

Score 9/10

Star Trek Revisitations

by Howard Weinstein Illustrators Gordon Purcell and Rod Whigham
Published by Titan Graphic novel £12.99 Out now

Grit your teeth and plough through four pages of the worst introduction to a graphic novel you'll ever read. It's worth it for the unintentional humour. After that, *Revisitiations* is standard licensed stuff – two bland and predictable stories peppered with somebody else's ideas of what our favourite characters from the original series are like.

The highlight is the return of Harcourt Fenton Mudd, the tricky, boastful, larger-than-life con-man who introduced Tribbles to the Cosmos and is now up to his neck in an intergalactic rebellion. Naughty man.

"Unfortunately, Spock is right. We can theorize all we want... but we've still got more questions than answers"

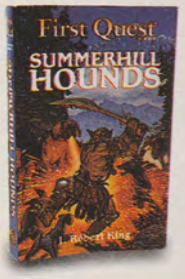
The art throughout is functional but uninspired. An example: this is the *Star Trek* crew after the movies, where Kirk has been busted back down to Captain. The trouble is, he looks about thirty years old when he should look seventy.

This sample highlights the real failure of this book: it's just not convincing. Even as a source book for referees, it's disappointing. There's nothing new here, just the same tired old storylines reworked a little. For the price, that's very poor.

Steve Faragher Score 3/10

Summerhill Hounds

by Robert King Published by TSR Paperback £3.99 Out now



This is a story in TSR's *First Quest* series, a range that is meant for children; but children of what age remains a mystery. Young 'uns might have difficulty swallowing this sickly bedtime medicine.

It's a doggy adventure about a pack of hounds that populates a vast fortress. The heroics start when their home is destroyed by a party of ravaging orcs who take all the human folk away as captives. The desperate dogs must discover their special powers and learn about the bond that exists between animals and man.

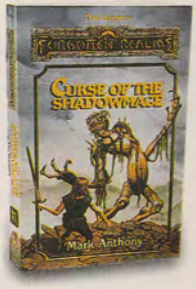
"Where the orc rabble had fallen back, an orc alpha advanced, its fingers splintering with rolling lightning and blasts of flame"

Alas, this shaggy tale is not nearly amazing, frightening or funny enough to entertain the average youngster. This is cuddly but pale pup fiction that falls short of the standards set by both classic and modern children's fantasy.

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 3/10

Curse of the Shadowmage

by Mark Anthony Published by TSR Paperback £4.99 Out now



Very pleasing, this *Forgotten Realms* adventure, if only because it considers the spiritual nature of magic rather than just using magic as a plot device to get the heroes out of sticky situations. Referees will find new ways of looking at old magic.

So it's got some good ideas, but as a novel it's less than great; the characterization is not sufficiently sympathetic for the reader to care about the outcome.

The story concentrates on the Harpers, fighters for Freedom and Justice. Laudable. The writing is articulate, but not always satisfying; for example, when a milk-cow gets turned inside out at a Harvest Festival, the author alludes to all kinds of other shadow-wrought grotesquerie without actually describing it in detail. Why not?

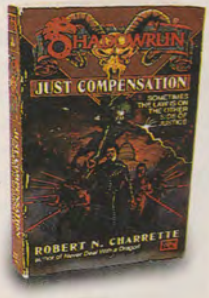
"That is its magic you feel. Let its magic fill you."

As well as these failings, the writer's descriptive skills managed to lose me once or twice in this slow-paced book. It's a reasonably good read, but I wouldn't go out of my way to lend it to you.

Jonathan Palmer Score 5/10

Shadowrun: Just Compensation

by Robert N. Charrette Published by RoC
Paperback US$4.99 Out now



Once more, the author of the first three *Shadowrun* novels returns to FASA's world of magic and technology with a story of corruption and power struggles at the highest level of government.

The plot centres on Andy, a young employee of the Telestrian Corporation who dreams of being a famous shadowrunner, only to have his illusions shattered when he gets caught up in events beyond his control and finds himself living the life of a real 'runner.

Just Compensation suffers from its resemblance to Charrette's original trilogy. Nearly all the elements are the same – the young, idealistic employee, the hardened shadowrunners, the complex plots of the bad guys – and Charrette still has a rather 'nice' view of the *Shadowrun* world, his writing seldom seeming to get to grips with the essential griminess of true cyberpunk.

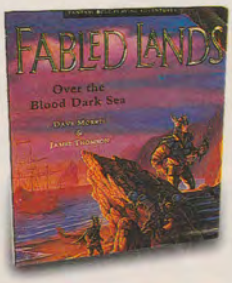
"Sometime after the soldiers had passed, he forced himself to his feet in a swirl of gray and a blaze of pain"

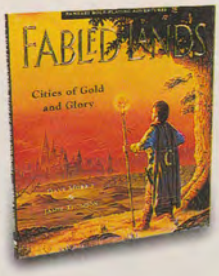
There are some good ideas here, though, and an interesting look at some of the politics of 2057 America – something that has generally been neglected. All the same, only dedicated fans of the game world will be willing to trudge through the rest of the book to find these insights.

Andy Butcher Score 4/10

Fabled Lands series

by Dave Morris and Jamie Thomson
Illustrated by Russ Nicholson Published by Pan
Large Format Paperbacks £4.99 each Out now



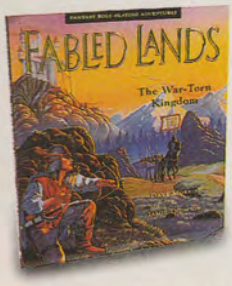


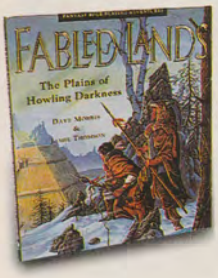
A good idea, this, especially for the publishers. The 12 gamebooks in this series (we have had four for review, the others are planned to follow later this year) are all interlinked. Starting with a low level character in the first book you buckle and swash your way across the fabled lands of the title. Each book covers an area of the world and, as you travel further and gain in power, you encounter new lands and – you guessed it – new books.

Now £4.99 seems like a reasonable sum to pay for one of these, but remember that the set will cost you nearly £60.

The books are very attractively presented, with large colour maps and ready-made characters in the fold-out covers. The actual gameplay is pretty familiar, requiring 2D6 plus one of the six attributes to reach a pre-set difficulty level in order for you to succeed at something. The basic mechanic is that of the numbered paragraph, with simple, fundamental decisions taking you to different outcomes.

"If you are on a quest for the temple of Nagil, to bring it the head of the escaped ghoul, turn to 446"





These books have a much more free-form element than other similiar ones, allowing you to roam freely about the land and set your own priorities and goals. An unfortunate side-effect of this is that the storylines never get really involving and you tend to drift somewhat aimlessly.

These books are obviously aimed at a young audience, although nowhere does it point out exactly what age you should be to enjoy them. About eleven or twelve, I'd have thought. Any younger and you'd be confused; any older and you'd be bored.

All in all, these books represent a pleasant but ultimately unchallenging diversion for younger players. A better option would be to get someone older to run a simple *AD&D* game.

Steve Faragher

Score 5/10

The 24-hour War

by Nick Pollotta Published by TSR
Adventure Game Book £3.99 Out now

You control the adventure! the cover trumpets proudly. Sadly, this is patently untrue. As I slogged my way through thirty-six paragraphs of turgid narrative, I was given that opportunity exactly fourteen times. I was specifically directed, however, twenty-one times. Furthermore, such choices as do arise are often simply fifty-fifty situations in which no intelligent surmise, nor even an intuitive guess, can be made, because the data needed to guide the choice is simply not there.

It is also quite impossible to feel involved with the character you're playing. Despite being promised that you *are* Jason Montgomery, an ordinary present-day teenager accidentally catapulted into the 24th century and emboldened by your suit of weapon-laden power-armour, the story is related in the first person, leaving the reader with the impression of viewing events from afar, rather than actually taking part.

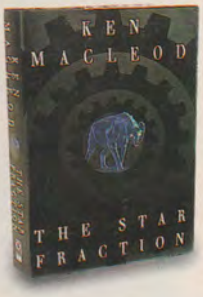
"I mentally asked if there was any way to disconnect his humour software. At least during a fight."

The writing is heavy-going, too. I can only assume these pocket adventures are intended solely as a hook for innocent children to draw them into the TSR RPG market. I despair for our young.

Chris Read Score 2/10

The Star Fraction

by Ken MacLeod
Published by Legend Hardback £10 Out now



This sci-fi debut arouses some interest because the author is a friend of Iain M Banks, but unfortunately the book lives up neither to this lofty connection nor its own early promise. It's a thriller set in post-nuclear-war Britain, in which a mercenary, a scientist and a computer whizz-kid are caught up in a political power struggle against the mechanisms of a mysterious AI. By page fifty events seem to be hotting up, but the story takes a downard glide.

"Something the shape and size of a cat padded up and rubbed against his calf. He stooped and stroked its electric hair."

The Star Fraction may be modern, flashy and (to a degree) cynical, but its narrative style is very much a return to Sixties sci-fi with its dreadful dialogue-led theorizing – and this can become a bit tedious after a while.

Pluses of the book, though, include a clever and well-described future culture that might be fun to play in (its institutions and factions have armed militia who act as legal terrorists in a game) and a great set of baddies who operate from cyberspace.

Gideon Kibblewhite

Score 5/10

Aliens: The Deadliest of Species: Predator

by Christopher Claremont Artist Eduardo Barreto
Published by Boxtree Graphic Novel £9.99 Out now

From word one, the reader is caught in a captivating whirlpool of retro-scenario, dream-state and current event, all cleverly woven together to create a fascinating story that gradually reveals its characters' motivations as they try to deal with the terrifying prospect of "Big Mama" Predator and the Alien Queen.

"Why can't reality stay the dream it was meant to be?"

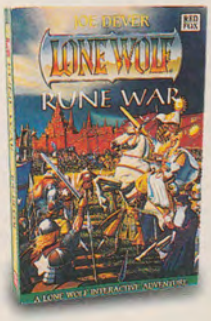
Claremont's intriguing text is excellently formed around Barreto's often stunning graphics. This is Samara station, a world of tough chicks, evil men, broody extra-terrestrials and, just to make things that touch more complicated, a mutated virtual reality nexus which confesses to being "beyond salvation".

Barreto displays a thorough knowledge of the female anatomy in illustrating – very tastefully, I may add – a story which ultimately deals with maternal instinct and female intuition in a fascinating way. Written in a style which provides plenty of space for intrigue and surprise, this novel is a marvellous example of the form.

Steve Watson Score 9/10

Lone Wolf 24: Rune War

by Joe Dever Published by Red Fox Adventure Game Book Out now



Lone Wolf books are set in the world of Magnamund, a standard S&S fantasy milieu within which you play an elite warrior possessing potent mental and physical powers. In this particular adventure, you are charged with thwarting the evil Lord Vandyan's plan to unleash a fearsome army of Vorka – sinister lizard-like creatures created by ancient rune magic.

There is an actual character generation process, and while it is simple, it does offer a good degree of choice over skills and equipment. The rules also allow you to carry a character from book to book, taking skills and any gear you've acquired with you. Character development through skills acquisition and enhancement is also catered for, albeit crudely.

"The Vorka are the key to Vandyan's military successes,' said Lone Wolf."

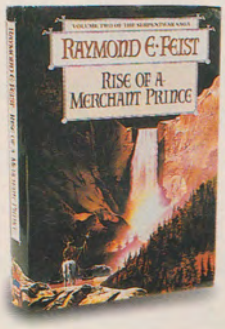
In play, mechanics are taken care of by the Random Number Table (equalling 1d10) and, in a tussle, the Combat Results Table. It's okay, but there are no modifiers or rules for multiple opponents, which is potentially confusing. The Random Number Table is also used throughout the adventure to resolve appropriate situations – but, unfortunately, initial guidance on whether a randomly generated nought is actually a nought or a ten is ambiguous.

On the plus side, the book is nicely illustrated and the narrrative is generally good with plenty of decision-making and 'interaction' with NPCs. Naturally, Lady Luck plays her fickle part, but your skills and common sense are much more relevant to your success. This, above all, gives the book a good feel.

Chris Read Score 6/10

Rise of a Merchant Prince

by Raymond E. Feist Published by HarperCollins
Hardback £15.99 Out now



My experience is that the second book in a trilogy can tend to lose its way. Typically, the plot gets shelved to make way for a money-spinning tour de force, and a minor character has trivial adventures while the real action simmers on the back burner.

At the beginning of *Rise Of A Merchant Prince*, the second in Feist's *Serpentwar* trilogy, this is exactly what seems to be happening; the plot whizzes off down a sidetrack, following the financial wheeler-dealing of the far-from-central Roo Avery. Fortunately, though, the main *Serpentwar* storyline still makes repeated appearances, with Erik Von Darkmoor travelling back to face the Pantathian snake priests. The effect is to create two distinct but subtly interwoven stories, populated with all the characters that Feist-vets will have come to recognise; Pug, Tomas and Nakor the Islani.

"This was the first of the Pantathian galleries, and inside they would find the serpent priests, and breeding females. The orders were simple: enter and kill every living thing."

The novel is the second in Feist's *Sepentwar* trilogy, which follows on from the continent-straddling adventure of *The King's Buccaneer* and *Prince Of The Blood,* and harks back to the original *Riftwar* saga which consists of the author's best known novels; *Magician, Silverthorn* and *A Darkness At Sethanon.*

Again, the book is excellently written but, like an old car on a winter's morn, it takes a while to get going. But when Feist does eventually get into his narrative stride, he writes with a colourful verbosity. I'm a sucker for his sagas and this one is far from the expected gap-filling potboiler. All in all, it's a great read.

Dean Evans Score 7/10

Classic Star Wars 3

by Archie Goodwin Artist Al Williamson
Published by Boxtree Graphic Novel £10.99 Out now

Star Wars given the graphic novel treatement? At first I was intrigued to find out how this could be achieved. My question was very soon answered: not very well.

There is no need to get too tuned in to the storyline, as the obvious is constantly stated, and as this is a compilation of weekly installments, there is a handy what-has-come-before section at the start of each new chapter. I marvelled at the way the Imperial Forces can grasp Shakespearean dialogue while at the same time appearing to be completely stupid; a remarkable achievement.

"Solo, my friend... it's difficult to become a pirate without first being a thief! And what worthwhile thief... is ever caught without a lockpick?"

Archie Goodwin has presumably decided that his fantastic story benefits from its characters' constant desire to explain every plot device. Han Solo seems to be suspicious of this and, indeed, by the fourth chapter, after one coincidence too many, he appears to have rumbled the writer: "I don't like it, it's too nice."

This is very weak indeed. The *Star Wars* concept deserves much better treatment than this basic pulp and clearly does not work in this format.

Steve Watson Score 3/10

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Copy of *Forgotten Realms* scenario called *Nightwatch* (in the living city) needed to borrow/buy. Alex Taggart 0151-343 9363.

Anyone got extensive information on the *Battletech* Universe to sell at a good price? Ring Ashley at 01270 663868 after 6pm.

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clubs

Birmingham Central Roleplayers; Thursdays 7.30 Ladywood Community Centre. Bar; over-16s; no complete arseholes. About £1 a night. Steve Jones 0121-585 7263.

Novice *Magic* player seeks club in the Halesowen or Birmingham area of the Midlands. Neil Hickman 01384 836343.

Leatherhead Games Club: small group meet Mondays in Leatherhead. Currently running *Earthdawn* Campaign. Interested? Ring Jef on 01372 375202.

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other stuff

Charity event: Alderhey Sick Children's home. Merseyside; LARP *Masquerade* game; a weekend in March; spaces available at £5 a head; B&B £15. Need referees; experience not necessary. Alex Taggart 0151-343 9363.

Espylacopa new fanzine: 16pp, £1, Fantasy/Horror/Humour plus unclassifiable stuff. No RPGers yet, but open to contributions. Neil White 01458 831492.

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January 1996

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arcane scribblings

Right. That's it. After this month we want no more letters telling us how wonderful we are. We're getting sick and tired of it. Write something else, please...

Dear sirs,

Allow me first to congratulate you for your excellent work on **arcane** magazine. It really is the first time I've read a true RPG magazine (even though I do not agree with the score of *Dragon Dice*, which was really very high for such a narrow game). As you will have realised, I'm refering to your first publication.

Even though we are close to 1996 I haven't found number two (**arcane** magazine) in Greece, country of the Olympian gods! To tell the truth I bought the first issue in England and because I am right now in Greece I'm searching desperately for number two! Tell me if I can find it in Greece. I think that itwould be a great investement for you to expand the borders of fantasy games into foreign countries.

I also believe that your 'little' is a smart idea and an acceptable surprise for the readers. Keep up the good work.

I await for your reply.

rodopi.cc.duth.gr

Crikey. Er, thank you, 'rodopi', for your e-mail. We hope you've found a copy of our second issue by now. And we're pleased you find our 'little' acceptable.

arcane appears in Europe about two weeks after it does in Britain, and about a month later it arrives in the States.

Dear arcane

Years ago I played with the Albino Dwarf. He inspired me, and together we adventured through the lands of Imagination. We fought Dragon's and Demon's Drawl. And though in his time my companion was called a Dragonlord, in later years he became sick and Housebound. So I set out as Player Independent, seeking the Last Provinces.

After years of Interaction I still seek the knowledge.

Truly it is arcane.

Paul Fricker

Hmm... very clever.

Dear arcane,

Well, what luck that I saw your magazine nestling behind *Dragon* in my local modelling shop.

I am 30, and I guess we're about the same age give or take, so we've seen 'em come and seen 'em go. *Imagine, Adventurer,* and all those ones in the middle that were good – and, of course, *White Dwarf,* may it rest in pieces.

I give you a year.

That is to say, well done on an excellent, absolutely drop-dead-gorgeously produced magazine with good, interesting articles, and a good mix of cards and RPGs. I love you all forever and I shall buy every issue you bring out. Indeed I'll insist my newsagent delivers it to me by hand.

But I still give you 18 months.

Well done on getting Future Publishing behind you. I've been a long standing Future reader, and I love the intelligence and wit that goes into their publications. With them behind you you should have muscle to get news-stand space.

Sad to say, though, I only give you two years.

arcane On-Line

Just a few snippets taken from the arcane forum on the Internet...

The ONLY REASON that I can see for these companies to release CCGs is to MAKE MONEY. I would like to see it recycled back into the RPG design process, since there are so few really good games coming out now, but it's just a cynical ploy to make money out of gullible gamers.

u9231919@queens-belfast.ac.uk

I agree with you that *Changeling* could be WW's best RPG, but only if they support it properly. The concept of playing children or dreamy teens instead of all-powerful undead monsters will only appeal to people with the soul of a poet in the first place.
There's a large RPG-tosser contingent out there that like wearing *Vampire* T-shirts and losing humanity and boasting about how high their Spheres are.
This is your market, I'm afraid.

101325.3553@compuserve.com

Personally I quite liked *Judge Dredd,* the rpg, because it was relatively simple (ever played *Rolemaster?)* and the GM could fudge any of the rules to make the game more entertaining. We have had sessions playing it where almost everyone was on the floor laughing due to the fact that the rules weren't in the way. It is mostly the setting that works for us though... if the rules were changed and were simple enough (yet had some depth if you wanted it) then we would probably switch over to that. Especially if some good scenarios were in the offing.

ccdmlh@river.tay.ac.uk

There definitely needs to be some LRP coverage, and not so much of the ILF stuff. In my opinion, if my character is supposed to be holding a sword, then I ought to be holding a sword. Of course any mention of the largest LRP website in the UK is appreciated.

http://palantir.soc.staffs.ac.uk/larp/

A.J.Blews@soc.staffs.ac.uk

letters

But what the hell, two years would be great. Future will love you and keep you in employment and I'll get to actually have a good roleplaying magazine to buy again – and then read over and over again – with all my old *Dwarfs, Imazines, Imagines, Adventurers, Sorcerer's Apprentices, Different Worlds* etc...

And, of course, you might just happen to roll a critical...

Tom Zunder

Tsk. Ye of litle faith.

Dear **arcane**

I have been reading your magazine and I notice that you have a phone number for Grenadier Models. I believe these people were responsible for producing the Cthulhu figures some years ago. I wish to purchase the entire range of Cthulhu figures but the number you quoted was 'not recognised'.

Can you help?

Tim Norton

Yes we can. Since our second issue went to press, there have been some changes. Grenadier are now distributed in the UK by Hobbygames who can be contacted on (01903) 730998. However, they no longer do the Cthulhu range of figures; that's now handled by RAFM, who can be reached in Canada on (001 519) 623 4832. We called them and they said they'd send you a catalogue anyway. Thank us.

Dear **arcane,**

Congratulations on issue 2, an improvement on issue 1 (which wasn't bad either).

I find it strange that Richard Garfield didn't expect anyone to get a full set of Magic Cards. Where is the point in releasing a full set of cards if no-one can get them?

One of my major complaints against CCGs is that it is so hard to get a full set, especially when certain cards require other cards to be playable. My first *INWO* set included the Gnomes of Zurich (special power +4 vs Banks, Banks count double for victory) and no Bank cards! Three or four sets later I had acquired Shangri La (victory condition – 30 points of peaceful power in play), but didn't have 30 points of peaceful power in my entire collection – sort of limits your options, really.

I would prefer the more traditional approach of basic sets and expansions, where you know what you are getting in the set and that it will all work together properly! (But then, I never liked those *Figurine Panini* sticker books as a kid, either...)

A couple of people question the negative view held by some gamers towards Games Workshop and, as you suggest, the conversion of *White Dwarf* from the British roleplaying and gaming magazine to a Citadel Miniatures Catalogue is one major source of complaint (especially to those of us who were in the middle of a subscription at the time, and ended up receiving magazines which contained absolutely nothing of interest/use to us), but this is only a part of the story.

By dropping all their other lines in favour of their own home-grown games and figures, they have made it less likely that players of their games will find out about other games, especially if they have a local GW branch, which means less people entering the hobby, which means a shrinking market, which means a shrinking hobby.

What might be more interesting is that all this happened 8-10 years ago, yet people still feel antipathy to a company that was once everything we could want (importer, retailer, designer, convention organizer, magazine producer). Now that Wizards of the Coast have dropped all their roleplaying lines, will the next century see letters from confused *Magic* players saying, "Why do roleplayers have it in for WotC?"

Keep up the good work,

Tim Ellis

If you've got access to the Internet, come and join in the discussion on our forum pages, post an ad or just use our collection of links to visit other sites around the world. **arcane** can be found at Futurenet. http://www.futurenet.co.uk/

Magic: The Gathering *was designed by Richard Garfield with the intention that nobody ever collected a full set. The idea behind this was that no matter how long you played, or how cynical you got, you were always going to come across people playing with a different set of cards that you'd never seen before and that would keep the game challenging to play.*

Luckily for him, it also proved to be just about the most effective method of marketing a game anyone has ever come up with, mostly because not being a collector himself he hadn't realised what lengths people would go to in order to collect a set.

And Games Workshop: shouldn't we let bygones be bygones?

Dear arcane,

In case anyone writes in, let me correct myself first on an error in the 'Flora and Fauna' article (**arcane** 2). *Trollpak* (without the 'c') got divided into three for the second edition: *Trollpak* (the core stuff), *Troll Gods* (religion) and *Into the Troll Realms* (campaign stuff). The giant insects feature largely in the campaign bit, which I referred to wrongly as *Troll Land.* →

letters

← I know, because I stumbled across a copy of the *2nd Edition* in a shop recently. Sorry about that.

Dan Joyce

Right. You're fired.

Dear Mr Faragher,

I was most interested to read your comments in **arcane** 2 concerning collectable card games, criticising some of your critics on this topic. I noted especially your comment: "If you can buy it in a specialist gaming shop, we'll cover it."

Are we to take this as meaning you intend to cover topics including computer games, board wargames, magazines, books fictional and factual, assorted Forteana, T-shirts & sweatshirts, badges, spin-off merchandising, body art, erotica and smoking impedimenta, amongst other items, or do you, like me, agree that there are already sufficient outlets for such things?

I cannot reconcile your position on collectable card games, which have no relevance to roleplaying whatsoever, with the subtitle of your magazine: **arcane** – the roleplaying magazine. Since we are presently inundated with a vast influx of card-gaming magazines, is it unreasonable to expect you to stick to your cover remit?

Yours sincerely,

Alistair McBeath

***Steve** says: Tell me, Alistair, did you read the rest of the magazine? Did you notice the computer game reviews? The board game reviews? The book reviews? The fanzine round-up? The miniatures reviews? The Source feature, filled with assorted gaming paraphernalia? Yes, I do mean that we will cover what you find in the average gaming store IN ITS ENTIRETY. We may have to reluctantly ignore the smoking impedimenta and erotica, however, since, search as I might, I've been unable to find them in my local store. More seriously, though, card games are a very major part of our hobby, whether you like it or not, and there's no way that we are going to stick our heads in the sand and pretend they don't exist. That would be ridiculous.*

Dear arcane,

I read with interest and astonishment the letter from Paul and Heidi Kaye in **arcane** issue 1. Interest because it mentioned interactive fiction, and astonishment that not only do Heidi & Paul believe they are among the only three people to be involved in England, but that they also believe it to be an American invention.

Well good news, Heidi and Paul: you are not alone. I have been writing and running interactive scenarios for LRP for seven years now and there are loads of other clubs and organisations who write their own scenarios and systems.

Unlike the American version, interactive scenarios in England are generally freeform. The IFL and other Americans write scenarios in which all the characters are pre-defined by the refs, a bit like the old *D&D*-style 'competition' scenarios. You get to play what the ref wants you to play, along a pre-ordained plot line.

English interactive scenarios generally start with a background provided by the refs, into which the players write (not 'generate') their own characters. The refs then write the plots for the weekend based around the characters created by the players.

As for papers/scissors/stone combat – pah! Get real! Americans use this form of combat because:

1) They're scared of being sued to Kingdom come should any 'physical' interactions go wrong (this is a real possibility for them).

2) They haven't figured out yet that people can both roleplay and use a weapon.

In England (Europe and Australia too) weapons range from blank-firing or laser-tag guns for modern day and futuristic scenarios to rubber swords for fantasy.

When you consider that the rubber swords are like those used in films such as *Labyrinth* and *Highlander* (and often made by the same people) you begin to get the correct picture of deeply atmospheric scenarios improved by film-quality props, weapons and special effects.

Lizi Graham

Our corrsepondent Lizi, whose letter appears on the left, belongs to the Adventurers Guild. For an information pack & a free copy of their house magazine *The Adventurer*, write to The Adventurers Guild, Flat 1, 4 Rectory Place, 93 Portsmouth Road, Guildford, GU2 5DG.

Dear arcane,

Good grief.

I'm astonished.

You've taken the biscuit, barrel and ball bearings with this one.

Congratulations on an outstanding magazine, the best I've ever read. Your magazine is informative without being lecturing, critical without being sarcastic and entertaining without trying to be 'hip'. All this *and* it is written with an underlying wit that is simply a joy to read.

I'll say it again. Congratulations! **arcane** 1 & 2 are the first magazines to win the coveted (erm) Mr Rob Seal of Approval.

Rob Barrett

Fan boy.

Dear arcane,

Currently I live and work in Taiwan, a country which has never heard of roleplaying games (and when I attempt to 'preach the gospel', they regard me as an insane foreigner whose strange religion is invaribly connected to the moral depravity of my home country... which it probably is), and your magazine is a breath of fresh air.

I've been living here for two years, and in that entire time *never* have I been able to play a game. It's just not done here... and the other foreigners I know think gaming is just too *weird*. Hurm. Go figure.

So when I discovered your magazine (quite by accident) in a Tower Records store, rapture clubbed me from behind. Not only do I like the work you've done in the first issue, I greatly anticipate the arrival of the next one! And it's not even January yet.

Chris Jones
dartfrog@hntp2.hinet.net

What a sorry tale. Can anybody help Chris find spiritual fulfilment in Taiwan?

Dear arcane,

Rather an odd thing. I wandered into Mantons newsagent in Lancaster to see if the new issue of **arcane** was out (it wasn't) and when I asked about it I got a very odd reception. The woman said they didn't stock occult magazines, and when I very politely said that it wasn't an occult magazine but a games magazine (without mentioning RPGs) she said that they wouldn't stock anything with a name like that no matter what it's about, and nobody else would either.

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with us there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter addressed to **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW. *The slightly more technically advanced can send us a* fax on (01225) 446019, *while all you fully fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at* arcane@futurenet.co.uk *or visit our web site on* http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html. *We look forward to hearing from you.*

letters

They'd probably have a problem with any RPG magazine, if they knew about it, but they've stocked *White Dwarf* for years.

Ken Walton

Quickly, Ken, put a hex on them. We'll slaughter some chickens to help.

Dear arcane,

About that article in issue 1 on *Magic: The Gathering*. In your mag you said that there were two challenges to get past before you were able to play this game; well, me and my friend Tim have discovered yet another (particularly for Tim). On opening the packet you delve inside and look at your first card through the film wrapping, and then you attempt to get at the damn thing. It took Tim about half an hour before he got through the film on the cards! So could you please tell the blokes down at Wizards of the Coast to have a little thought for complete arseholes like Tim and include some rules for opening the wrapper.

Mark Gibson

We hope Tim remains your friend after reading this. And don't worry. We've told WotC off on your behalf.

Dear arcane,

Just thought I'd drop you a note to let you know a few things in general.

1. It's great to see Future doing a games mag, I read a lot of their other titles in the PC line. You certainly seem to have it together, so best of luck to you all.

2. Thanks for the nice things you said about Gaelcon, it's much appreciated.

Here's a few interesting facts about it:

a) It's the biggest independent games convention in the whole of Europe (as far as we can tell) with over 2,000 people crossing our threshold during the three days (though not necessarily different people, you understand!)

b) There is a card in *INWO Assassins* that Steve Jackson decided to put in while he was here. It's called Irish Flu. The story goes as follows; at Gaelcon '93, Steve was our Guest of Honour and came down with a virulent flu. In fact all the committee did as well; it was so bad that the Con was very nearly cancelled.

We renamed it CONtamination '93. Despite looking and feeling like shit, Steve proceeded to play games with just about anyone he could find. When he went back to the States he passed the flu on to all of his office and as a result the product they were meant to print was a month late! This year, when he returned, everyone was slagging him about it and asking how he felt, and someone suggested that it would make for a great card (he was still racking his brain for two more). He liked it and so it got printed!

Tom Murphy

Good story.

From Wasteland Games,

After reading the review of our games in issue 2 of your fine magazine, I thought that it would be best that I send this letter in to counterbalance some of the disinformation contained therein.

First, the copy of *MAJI* reviewed was a pre-production version. We realise that coming up with viable scenarios can be difficult in this genre, and so the full version of *MAJI* (available March 11th) will include enough encounters and vignettes to give any referee's imagination a kick-start.

As regards the scenarios in *Killing Ground*, they were always intended to be separate, one-off scenarios. A lot of people have enjoyed playing and running them, and we are sorry that they did not come up to your reviewer's rigorous standards of excellence.

Lastly, *Point Blank*'s mechanics are entirely different from those of *STOCS lite*. It is a separate game, and in no way a supplement to the latter. There is also no background in *Point Blank* – we instead did our best to introduce an ethos and an attitude into the game, based on HK action films such as *The Killer* and *Hard Boiled*. It is a vehicle for cinematic action games, pure and simple.

Cheers and a happy new year to all,

Eoin Connolly, Wasteland Games

PS: I have difficulty picturing Charlie Chan firing an M-60 from the hip, screaming, "Feed me, number one son! feed me!"

We're always happy to receive feedback from readers, game-players or manufacturers. Part of the ethos behind a magazine like **arcane** *is that impartial, intelligent criticism of games helps improve the quality of games available. By the same token, we, too, benefit from feedback; the more we get, the better the magazine will be.*

We appreciate your concerns, Eoin, but we stand by our marks. Anyway, we rather liked STOCS lite...

And yes, the reference was supposed to be to Jackie Chan – for some reason, the mistakes that slip through do tend to be the ridiculous ones.

Wasteland Games have asked us to inform you of their full address, in case you wish to contact them but are unable to track them down: so here you go...

Wasteland Games
67 Eglinton Street,
Portrush,
Co. Antrim,
N Ireland
BT56 8DZ

arcane shorts

Tasty smaller extracts from our monthly postbag.

I can't believe nobody mentioned it yet. Hang on, my dinner's burning.

Smithy

Erm. Pardon?

Let us see more of this independent ideology, rather than the biased propaganda preached by certain 'large indoctrinating RPG corporations'. Walk tall comrades and show big brother we know where he lives.

May this fruit of your loins be the beginning of a long and orc-free journey.

The Ghost of Daniel the Goat

Just so long as you don't know where WE live.

Sprechen Sie Deutsch? – the RPG of United Nation's translators. All campaigns take part at international summit meetings and characters have to just sit around and make language skill rolls all the time.

Smithy

Hello. He's back.

Since moving to Cheshire from the other end of the world (Cornwall, to the uninformed), finding new gamers has proved difficult.

Chris Wright

Well, try using our free reader ads, you fool.

Right, gotta go to a xmas party now. Better go trim my beard and iron my anorak. Bye.

Smithy

And farewell to you too. You strange young thing you. Hope your dinner was okay.

IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS

by TB Falsename Episode Two

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE:

Seeing his parents mugged to death when he is six years old, embittered creep Bruce Spruce pledges to devote his life to fighting crime. After fifteen years of training he embarks upon his crusade, but the strain of battling evil all night and posing as a millionaire playboy by day proves too much, and within three weeks Bruce is hooked on amphetamines. He dies a broken man, foiled by villainy's ploy of timing many crimes to happen simultaneously, and his crafty butler is able to sell his secret equipment at enormous profit and negotiate himself an executive position in Twodor's defence labs.

Meanwhile, in the faraway town of Akansaxchukabuk, Princess Breasts is confounded in another escape attempt, unaware that a mysterious cloaked figure is planning to spring her from the outside.

Now read on.

(Scene: Princess Breasts' cell in the heavily fortified tower. Her captor, Rochangrafel, crumples a chisel in his meaty paws.)

ROCHANGRAFEL: Breaching the window would have done you no good, my lady. It is a hundred foot drop to the ground.

PRINCESS *(defiantly)*: I'd have made a rope from my blankets, you oaf.

ROCHANGRAFEL: This is a duvet, Princess.

PRINCESS: Ten thousand curses.

(Knocks rap upon the door. Or raps knock. Whatever. Rochangrafel unlocks the cell. Enter Captain Raxinfraxin.)

PRINCESS *(dumbfounded)*: Captain Raxinfraxin – I thought you were dead.

RAXINFRAXIN *(oilily)*: No, my dear. You are thinking of somebody else.

PRINCESS: Perfidious fiend. What would you mean have done with me?

RAXINFRAXIN *(scornfully)*: Inhibiting clarity will not help you, Princess. You will remain here as a safeguard against strong feeling over my becoming Lord Protector in the absence of your father. In that case I will marry you to secure my position.

PRINCESS *(with steely resolve)*: Insidious devil. You will never win. I shall not rest until I have escaped and exposed you. And if you intend to use me for political means, think again. No threat or wizardly incantation will make me betray my people.

(A pause.)

RAXINFRAXIN: Right, fine. *(To Rochangrafel.)* Have her killed. *(Leaves.)*

PRINCESS: Christing puce.

(Cut to edge of swamp surrounding tower. Cloaked figure and mercenaries discuss tactics while the Spirit of Ash looks on smartly.)

FIRST MERCENARY: With my Cloak of Darkness I shall lurk in the shadows.

SECOND MERCENARY: Calling on my Ring of Illusions, I'll draw out the guards by appearing as a small family in distress.

THIRD MERCENARY: This +2 Enchanted Crossbow will fill the air with deadly bolts.

FOURTH MERCENARY: And while my Gleaves of Encumberment tangle the survivors...

FIFTH MERCENARY: ...the Key That Seduces All Locks will get us inside.

(Ash bludgeons the mercenaries with a shovel.)

CLOAKED FIGURE *(gathering up artefacts)*: Well, that's saved some money. *(Peering into swamp.)* There's a trampled path, almost as if a division of soldiers had fought their way across the swamp at the behest of a nittish commander. What luck. Bun?

ASH *(shading eyes)*: Stay your aerated pastry, my friend. I see that the swamp monsters have lost their fear of iron and are waiting en masse; also that Princess Breasts has just been hurled from the top of the tower. *(Gravely.)* We'll never make it in time.

FIGURE: Nevertheless, we must try and. *(They race into the swamp.)*

(Can Ash and the cloaked figure possibly force their way through the swamp in the seven seconds before Princess Breasts hits the ground like a soggy child? And that gaunt stranger, eh?)

TO BE CONTINUED...

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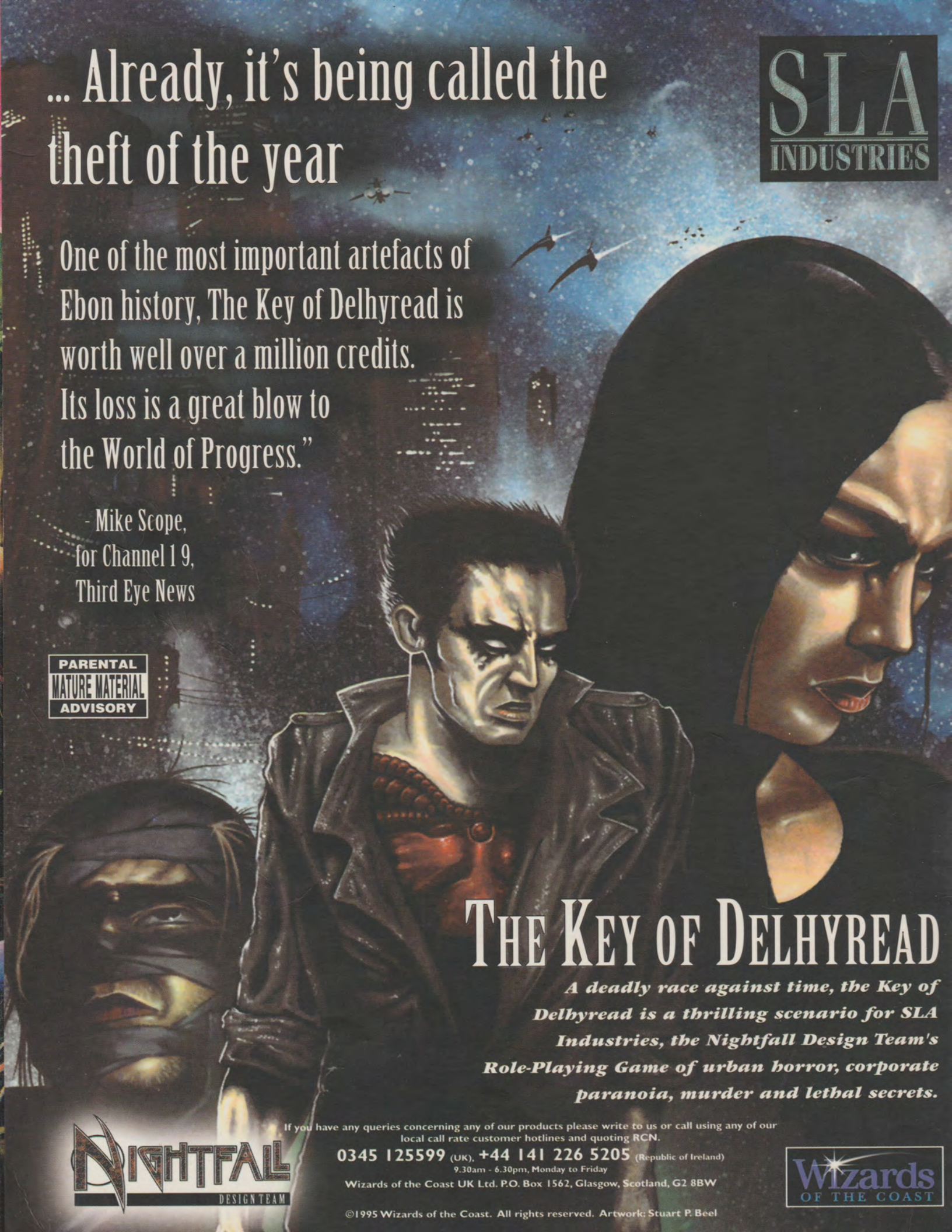
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- Mike Scope, for Channel 19, Third Eye News
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